TRẦN VĂN CẨN – HỮU NGỌC – VŨ HUYÊN

VIETNAMESE CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ХУДОЖНИКИ ВЬЕТНАМА

PEINTRES VIETNAMIENS CONTEMPORAINS

TRẦN VĂN CẨN — HỮU NGỌC — VŨ HUYÊN
with the collaboration of MAI VAN NAM

CONTEMPORARY VIETNAMESE PAINTERS

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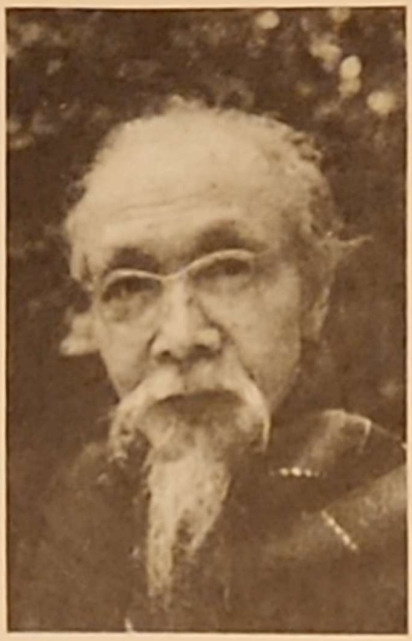
THE ELDERS:
THOSE WHOSE FIRST WORKS DATE BEFORE THE AUGUST 1945 REVOLUTION

NAM SƠN
(1890 – 1973)



Going to rice market
Indian ink

Real name: Nguyen Van Tho
Born in Hanoi

First he received Sino-Vietnamese traditional education and tried painting landscapes in Indian ink. Later he went to Protectorate College (France — Vietnamese education) in Hanoi.

While working as a civil servant he continued to perfect himself in the art of painting and contributed illustrations to different magazines. Between 1918 and 1922, his first acquaintance with French painting gave him insights into western art. In 1925 he attended short courses at the National College of Fine Arts and the National School of Decorative Arts in Paris. Back in Vietnam, he became one of the first Vietnamese lecturers at the Indochinese College of Fine Arts set up in 1925 by the colonial regime. He was awarded a Silver Medal at the 1972 Paris Exhibition for his oil painting "Portrait of My Mother."

One of the first Vietnamese painters in the contemporary period, Nam Son marked the transition between Asian traditions and Western innovations... Not only was he strongly attached to the ancient style of the country (Indian ink, sanguinity, symbolism, suggestive effects, calligraphy, silk...) but he did not hesitate to experiment with oil painting and other Western pictorial genres either.

Fighter's dream
Sanguine, 1960, size 53 × 66cm

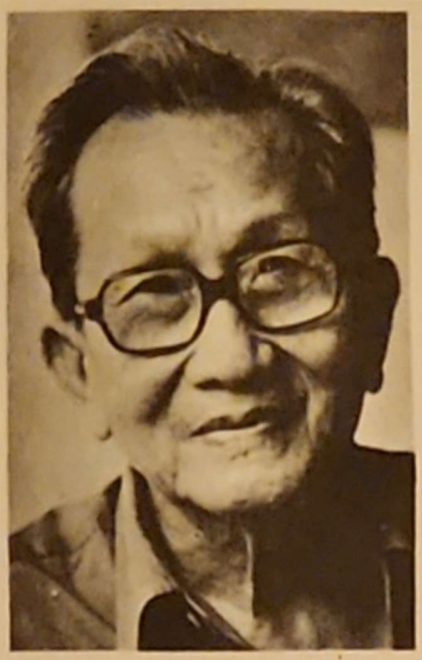
NGUYỄN PHAN CHÁNH
(1892 – 1984)

Children's game,
Silk, 1931, 62 × 85

This nonagenarian artist was born in Trung Tiet village, Thach Ha district in former Ha Tinh province. Coming from a learned but poor family, he received classical Sino — Vietnamese education before going to school run by the French colonial administration. At the age of 33 he was admitted to the Indochinese College of Fine Arts (first opening in 1925) from which he graduated in 1931. Erought up in traditional art he found it difficult to adapt himself to western oil painting and other modern subjects. He preferred to work on peasant life and found it only at its best in the traditional genre of silk painting to which he brought poetry, new grace of soft colour, full of shades and suggestions.

Nguyen Phan Chanh took part in both national resistance wars and was awarded the Order of Independence.

Breast-nursing
Silk, 1970,
50 × 65



NGUYỄN PHI HOANH

(1905 -)

Dong Da Hillock
Oil, 1978

Born in Ben Tre (South Vietnam), he went to secondary school in France and studied painting there. In 1930 he won Mauny Prize and a Silver Medal of Toulouse Municipality. Back in Vietnam, he taught painting at various private schools in Saigon while participating in patriotic activities after 1936. After the 1945 August Revolution he was elected a member of the first National Assembly of independent Vietnam. He was a member of the Provisional Revolutionary Administrative Committee of South Vietnam (formerly Cochinchina) in 1945. In 1954, he was regrouped in the North. He taught at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam. In 1975, after the liberation of Saigon, he went back to the city where he taught at the College of Fine Arts. His oil painting is classical in its approach. He is the author of two books on the history of Fine Arts in Vietnam and the world.

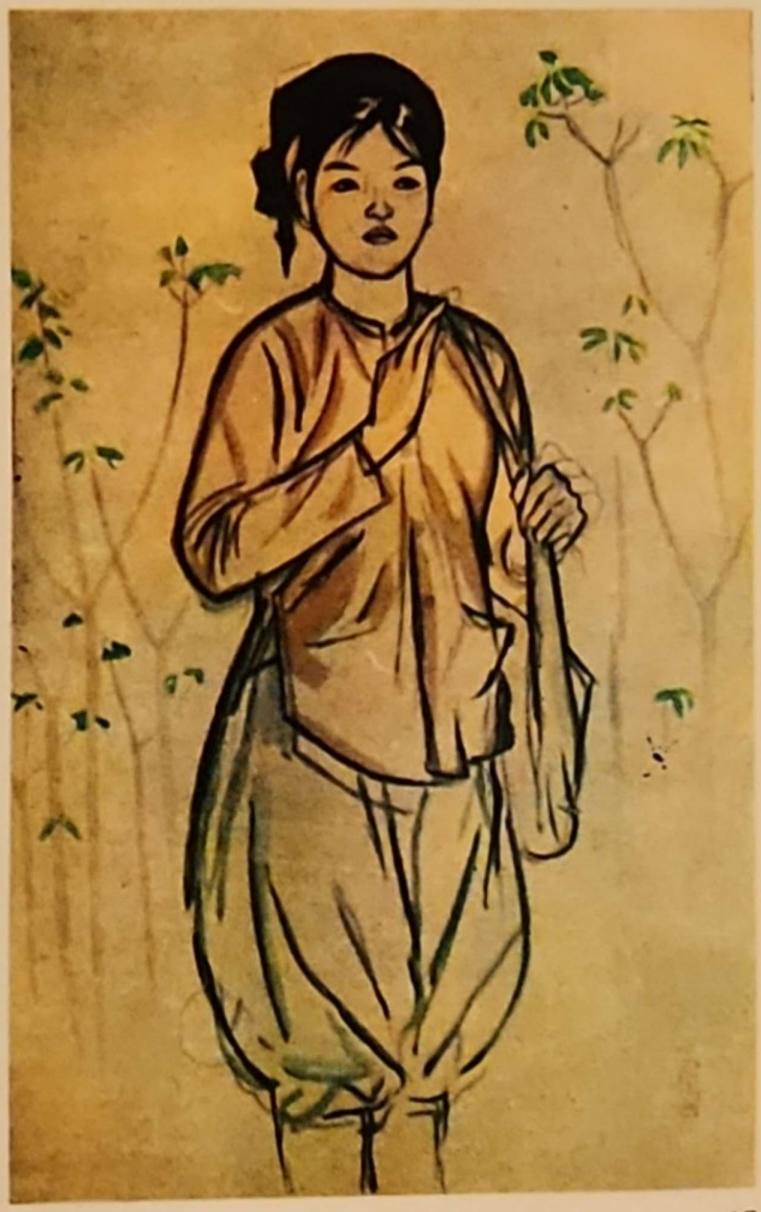
Rice-carrying boat
Oil, 1960, 61 × 77

TÔ NGỌC VÂN
(1906 – 54)

Girl with Madonna lilies
Oil, 1940, 46 × 60

Born in Hanoi. Other names and pseudonyms: To Van Xuan, To Tu, Ai My. He was the son of a small civil servant belonging to traditional culture. After finishing the Indochinese College of Fine Arts in 1931, he taught in Phnom Penh and Hanoi. After the victory of the 1945 August Revolution he became the first director of the College of Fine Arts of independent Vietnam. Although killed on duty during a French air raid (Dien Bien Phu campaign) one month before the signing of the Geneva Agreements, he had already trained several generations of artists.

Before the Revolution he was well known as a singer of feminine beauty and knew how to enliven it through well studied composition and use of simple and precise forms, the boldness of his symphony of colours which stand out against the timid of contemporary artists. His passion for the cultural heritage led him to join the national resistance together with the working people who furnished him with themes for artistic creation. He devoted a lot of time to promoting Vietnamese lacquer which, he thought, would open up a new way to painting.



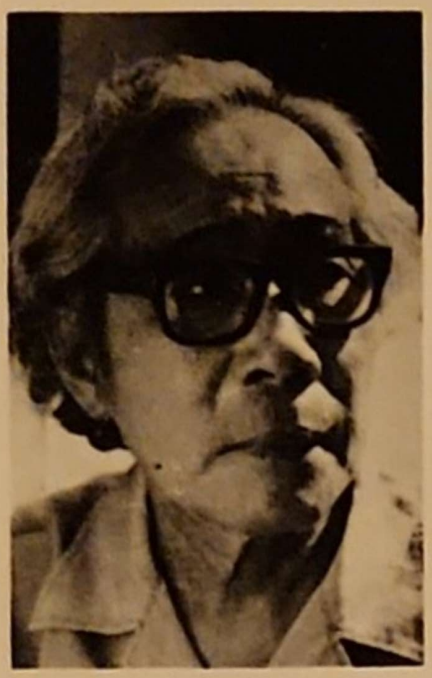
Militiawoman
Water colour, 1954,
32 × 49

TRẦN VĂN CẨN
(1910 –)

Born into a poor intellectual family, he graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts in 1936. Opposed to colonialist conceptions held by the director of this college, he refused an official appointment to live on his art. He worked in the Cultural Association for National Salvation before the 1945 August Revolution. He actively took part in the two resistance wars for national independence and contributed to the birth of a socialist and national art. He was director of the Vietnam College of Fine Arts (1955 — 64), and in 1983 President of the Vietnam Association of Plastic Artists. Tran Van Can excels in all genres : lacquer, oil, wood-engraving, silk, etc. His decorative art springs spontaneously from realism and emotion while his grace and freshness bathe in lyrism. He is considered one of the pioneers of modern Vietnamese lacquer. Open to foreign influence as he is, he remains firmly Vietnamese.

Shampooing
Wood engraving,
1943, 32 × 21

Water-scooping
for the 5th
Lunar-Month
Crop
Lacquer, 1958,
62 × 92



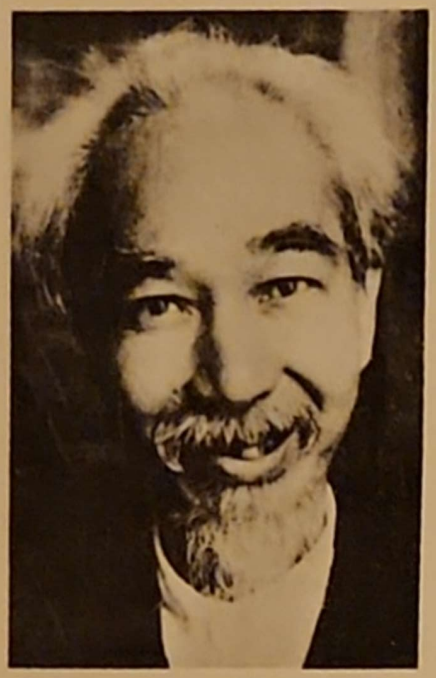
HOÀNG TÍCH CHÙ

(1912 -)

Uncle Ho and children planting trees
Lacquer, 1960,
90 × 120

Born in Phu Luu village (Tu Son district, formerly Bac Ninh province). He graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts (1941). He joined the 1945 August Revolution right from the beginning. In 1947 fleeing from a French mopping-up operation in the liberated zones, he had to enter Hanoi where he took part in underground activities and because of this he was put to gaol in 1933. After the liberation of North Vietnam he was professor of lacquer at the Vietnam College of Fine Arts and the Director of the Hanoi Institute of Applied Arts. As a master of lacquer painting he has trained many artists.

Mutual-aid group in a mountainous region
Lacquer, 1958, 70 × 100

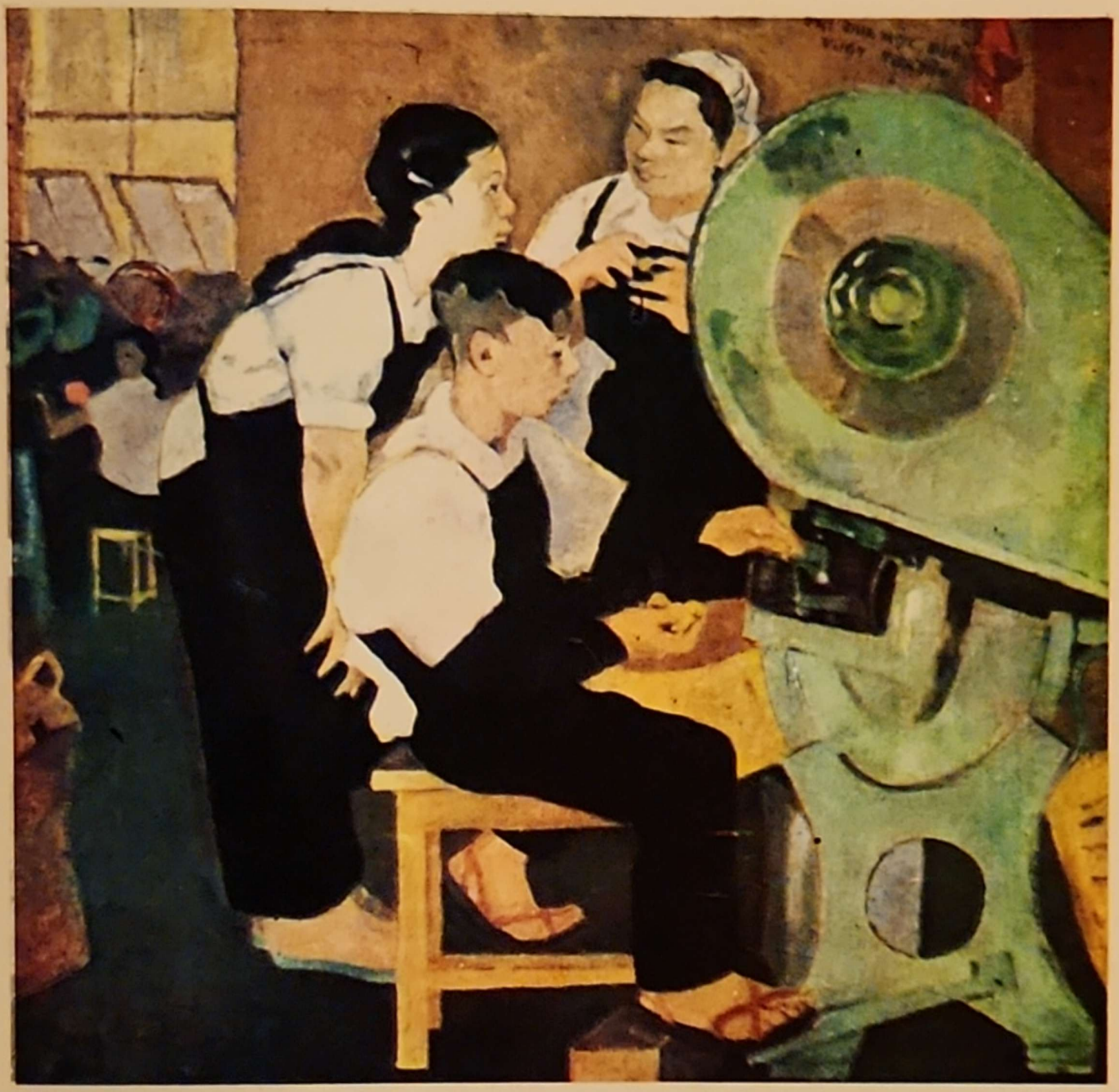


NGUYỄN ĐỖ CUNG
(1912 – 77)

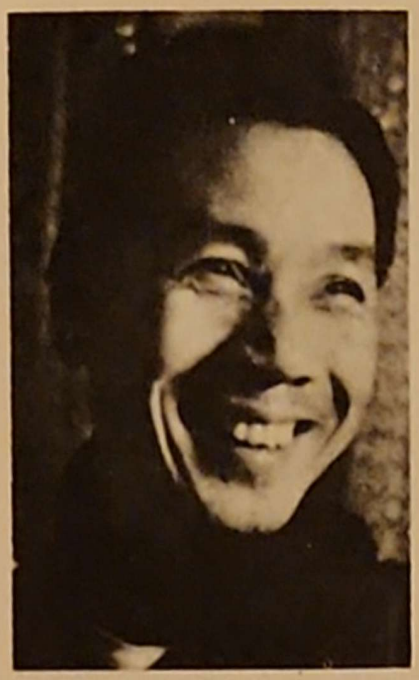
Guerrila at the firing gallery
Gouache, 1947, 37 × 50

Born in Xuan Tao village, Tu Liem district, Hanoi suburbs. Son of Nguyen Do Muc, a learned Confucian patriot and well-known translator of Chinese novels. He graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts (1936). He wrote for the press to oppose colonially-minded French professors who wanted to turn his Arts College into a simple centre for training artists.

Extremely scholarly, he was a pioneer and authority in the matter of national art. He used his brush to serve the two resistance wars. He set up the Vietnam Museum of Fine Arts and became its first director. He trained many disciples. As an open and scrupulous artist, he knew how to combine traditional art with modern art. The few gouaches and oil paintings he left behind are very striking because of their almost geometrical composition of masses which, with their vigourous touches, by no means overwhelms the freshness and delicacy of the tones.



Learning from one another
Oil, 1962, 92 × 92



NGUYỄN KHANG
(1912 -)

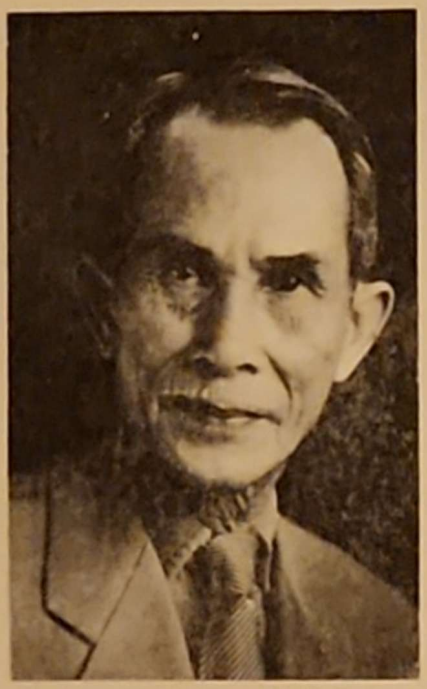
Peace and friendship
Lacquer, 1958, 90 × 90

Born in Hanoi. Graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts in 1935. He took part in the two resistance wars. He was Director of the Hanoi College of Applied Arts until his retirement. In lacquer he subjects realism to decoration, knowing how to exploit the varied techniques of this traditional art (splendor of harmony of gold, black and red; conventionalizations in painting figures, visages, flowers, leaves, relief and hollow-engraving).

Marching across a stream (fragment)
Lacquer, 1960 92 × 273

LƯƠNG XUÂN NHỊ

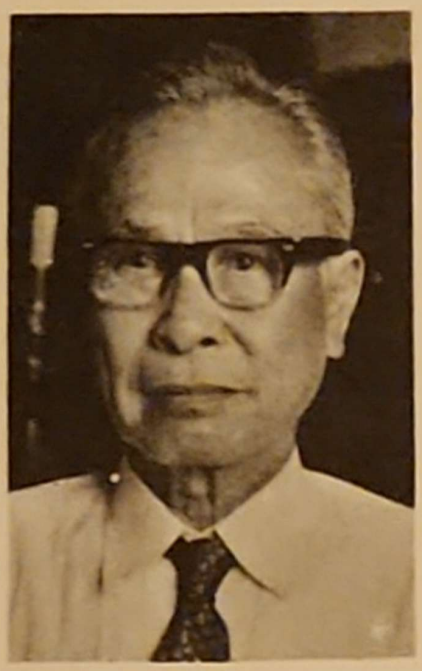
(1913 –)



Poultry
Silk, 1982, 46 × 39

Born in Hanoi and graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts (1938). He lived on painting and photographing, and did some ameteur film-acting. He has been professor of artistic anatomy at the Hanoi College of Fine Arts since its reopening in 1955. He specializes in silk and oil painting. Of a methodical mind, he is very meticulous in composition and execution, handling with mastership the green tone.

At the edge of a well
Lacquer, 1956, 70 × 72

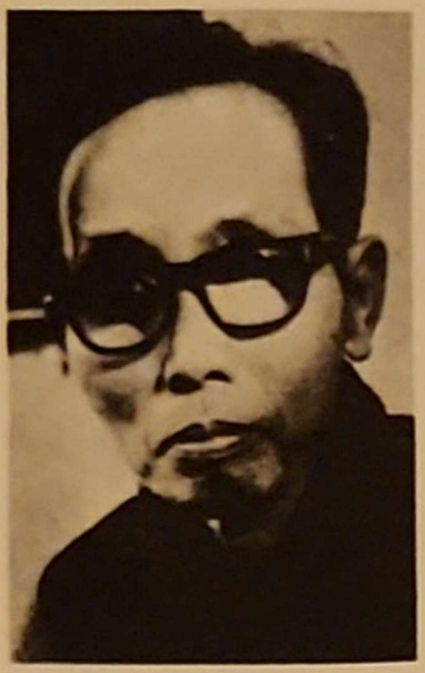


NGUYỄN ĐỨC NÙNG
(1914 - 83)

Stop US nuclear test
Lacquer, 1958, 60 × 81

Born in Huyen Ky village (Thanh Oai district, Ha Son Binh province). Graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts (1938). After the 1945 August Revolution he served in the People's Army (4th War Zone). 1954 — 1974: professor at the Vietnam College of Fine Arts. After 1975 he headed the section for research into fine arts, which later became the Institute of Research of Fine Arts. He translated into lacquer the working life and the aspirations of the people with whom he felt quite close.

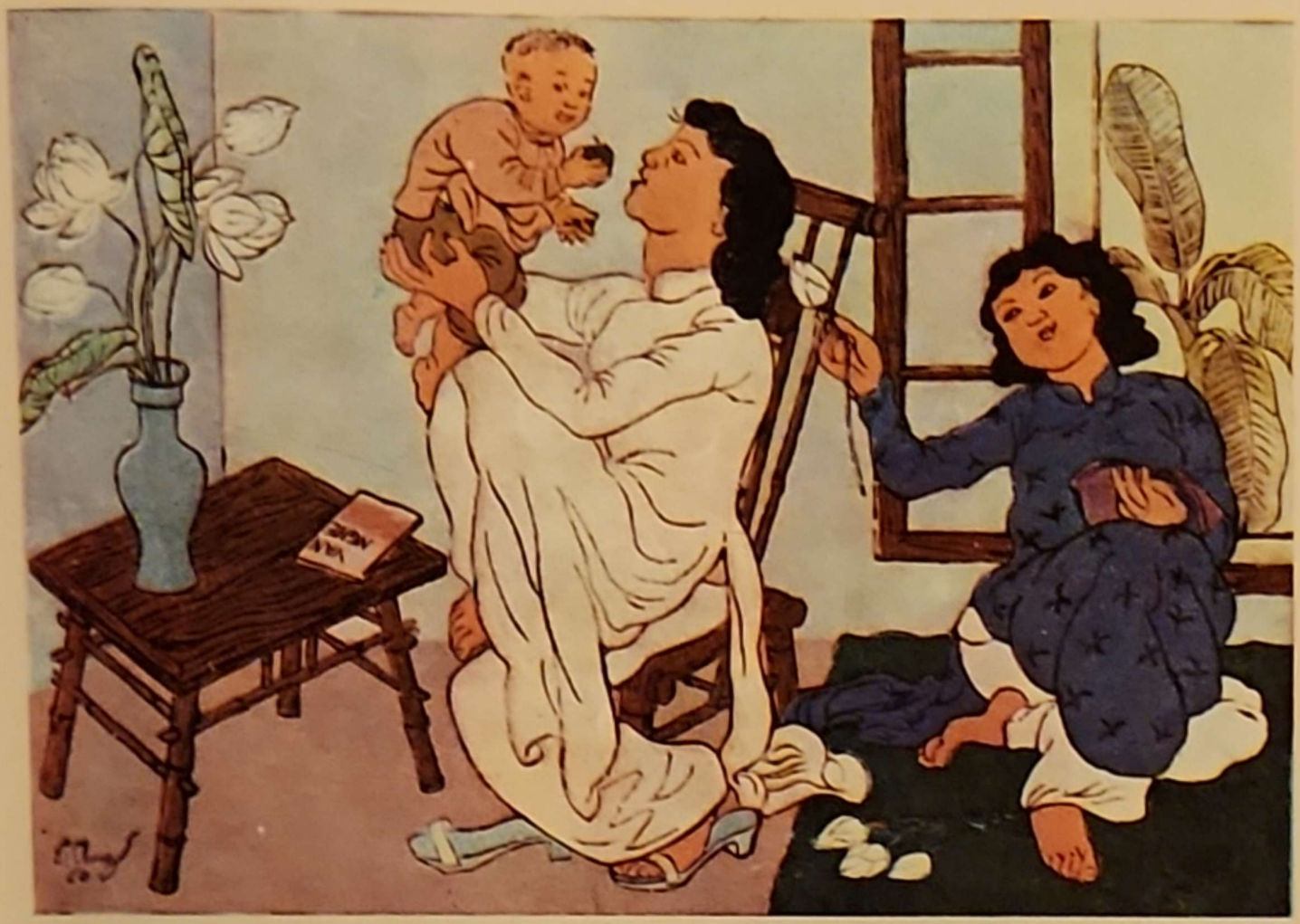
Farm at dawn
Lacquer, 1958, 91 × 63



NGUYỄN TIẾN CHUNG
(1914 - 76)

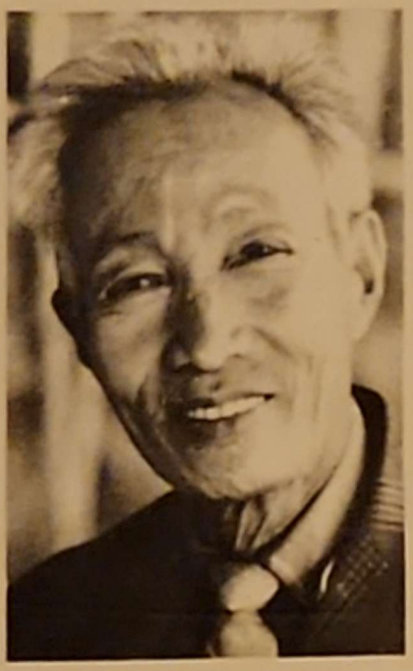
Born in Hanoi. Graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts (1940). 1955 — 56 : professor at the Vietnam College of Fine Arts.

Though one of the masters of silk painting he was quite at home with other genres (oil, lacquer, wood engraving, Indian ink, etc). As a great connoisseur of traditional art he knew how to exploit all the rescurces of the Vietnamese cultural heritage.



On a Sunday
Wood engraving, 1960, 47 × 33

◀ Poet Nguyen Du on his fishing boat
Lacquer, 1974, 80 × 120



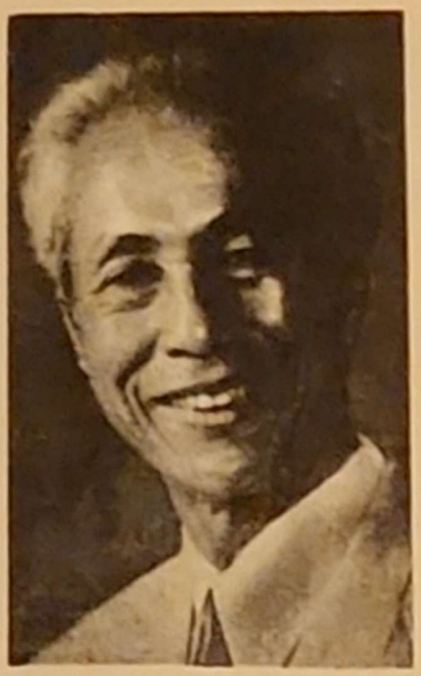
BÙI TRANG CHƯỚC

(1915 –)

Born in Hanoi. Graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts in 1941. Known as a designer of postal stamps and banknotes. A specialist in engraved lacquer he enhances the qualities of his composition and study of details.

Thai Nguyen Complex
Wood engraving, 1962, 115 × 153

◀ Hydro power project
Lacquer
engraving 1984



VĂN GIÁO
(1916 -)

Drying the soldier's uniform
Gouach, 1962, 53 × 65

Born in Hanoi. A non-registered student at the Indochinese College of Fine Arts where he was not admitted because of his political activities. At the beginning of the first resistance war he served as an artist in the South (5th War Interzone). In 1949 he returned to the North where he pursued his artistic career in the Army until the end of the war. Self-taught, he specializes in gouache and is at his best with landscape. Of a fiery temperament, and spontaneously inspired as he is, his work are not homogeneous. The best show a vigour of touches linked with the freshness and purity of colour. With him gouache has acquired a respectable place among pictorial genres in Vietnam.

The Kneeling Elephant Temple in Hanoi
Gouach, 1957, 36 × 51

NGUYỄN HIÊM
(1917 - 76)

Tam Vu Battle
Gouach, 1948, 60 × 95

Born in South Vietnam (former Chau Doc province) where he went to the Gia Dinh School of Applied Arts. From the beginning of the first resistance, in 1945, he worked as an artist in the the People's Army and remained so until his death. In 1955 he won the first prize of the National Exhibition for his works depicting battles in the South. He worked within several genres: lacquer, oil, etc., but excelled in gouache. Without technical pretentions he found his force of expression in his fighter's heart. His works are full of spontaneity, dynamism and optimism.

Fighters marching at night
Lacquer, 1958, 100 × 150

NGUYỄN VĂN BÌNH

(1918 –)

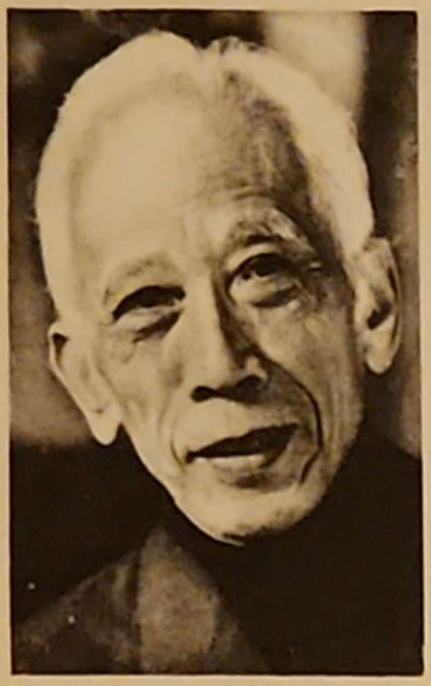
Born in Hanoi. Graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts. He worked in the propaganda service after the 1945 August Revolution and during the first resistance war. He has taught at the Vietnam College of Fine Arts. His favourite genre is lacquer: he knows how to combine traditional elements of conventionalization and decoration with the western pictorial technique for blending the real with the unreal.

Two young ladies
Lacquer, 1984, 40 × 50

◀ Bamboos and banana trees
Lacquer, 1958, 68 × 100

PHẠM VĂN ĐÔN

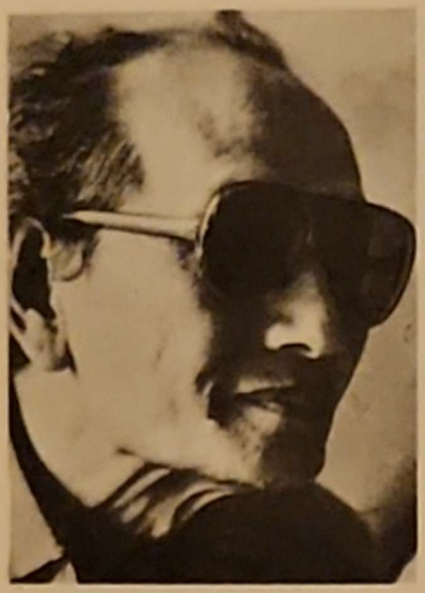
(1918 -)



Emperor Quang Trung
Wood engraving, 1980, 30 × 42

Born in Bach Mai (Hanoi suburbs). Graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts in 1944. During the first resistance war he used his artistic skills in the Army, made beautiful lithos for propaganda and engaged in theatrical decorations. He is a professor at the Vietnam College of Fine Arts. Practising several genres he is most successful in wood engraving, combining his western experience (composition) with the traditional technique of popular printing of Dong Ho Village (colour, drawing).

Madonna lilies
Wood engraving, 1971,
26 × 36

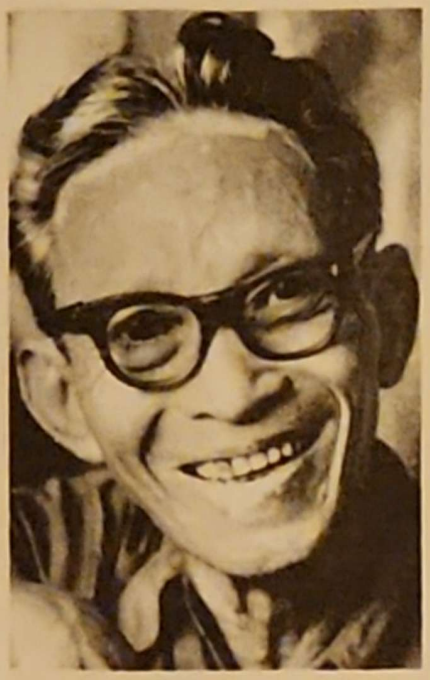


LÊ QUỐC LỘC
(1918 - 87)

Crossing the old hamlet
Lacquer, 1959, 130 × 192

Born in Khoai Chau district (Hai Hung province), he acquainted himself with lacquer while working at the Indochinese College of Fine Arts. After the 1945 August Revolution he was involved as a cultural fighter in the first resistance war. Following the Geneva peace agreements (1954) he was appointed Vice-Director of the Hanoi School of Applied Arts. After that he joined the Secretariat of the Vietnam Association of Fine Arts where he remained until his retirement. Enjoying traditional handicraft he carries out successful research into ceramics. Above all he practises laquer and experiments with great faithfulness the traditional techniques and pallet (black, vermilion red, gold and silver, shells...). His best successes enhance both pictorial art and artistic handicraft.

From the dark
Lacquer, 1982,
123 × 123



NGUYỄN CAO THƯƠNG

(1918 -)

Tinh Tuc tin mine
Oil, 1957, 75 × 110

Born in former Bac Lieu province (South Vietnam). 1936 — 38: studied at the Indochinese College of Fine Arts. 1945: participated in the Revolution. He joined the Army in the first resistance war. He is famous for having brought down an enemy plane with a simple rifle. In 1954 he was regrouped north of the 17th parallel. He taught at the School of Applied Arts. He studied oil painting in the Soviet Union for five years. Back in Vietnam he was a professor at the Vietnam College of Fine Arts. After the reunification of the country in 1975 he went back to South Vietnam where he heads the Middle-level School of Applied Arts. He specialises in oil painting where he remains classical in composition and use of perspective; he loves playing with highlight and shadow.

Uncle Ho visiting an A. A. battery
Oil, 1969, 200 × 300

NGUYỄN VĂN TY

(1918 -)

Spring pilgrimage
Silk, 1977, 65 × 47

Born in Hanoi. Graduated from the Indochinese College of Fine Arts (1941). During the first resistance war he worked in the Association of Literature and Arts of the 4th Military Interzone before joining the maquis in Viet Bac where he taught at the Vietnam College of Fine Arts. In 1969 he stopped teaching to devote himself entirely to plastic creation. He has written a good book on teaching painting. Enjoying lacquer he has proved his mastery in this art with more than one picture.

Thuy Nguyen hamlet
Lacquer, 1958, 60 × 100

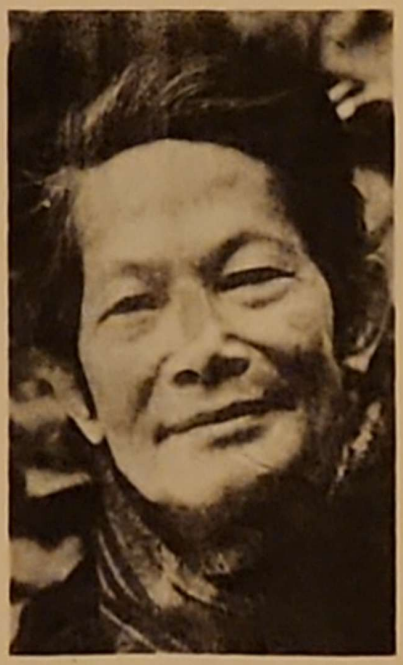
TẠ THÚC BÌNH
(1919 –)

Illustration to children's story book
Water Colour, 1979

Born in the chief town of the former Bac Giang province in 1919.

1940 — 45: studied at the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. He took part in the Viet Minh activities before the August 1945 Revolution. During the first war of resistance, he worked for the Service of Propaganda of Bac Giang and Thai Nguyen (First Military Interzone). From 1954 until his retirement, he taught at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam. He is well-known, among children for his cartoons. His works (gouache, silk, illustration for books) are classical in their execution and show their Vietnamese character.

Rice harvest
Gouach, 1954, 40 × 61



SĨ NGỌC

(Nguyễn Sĩ Ngọc,. 1919 –)

Bowl of green tea to the fighter
Lacquer, 1949, 58 × 80

Born in Thanh Tri (Hanoi). 1944: graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. During the very first days of the August 1945 Revolution, he became a member of the Cultural Association for National Salvation. During the first war of resistance, he worked as a militant artist in the 4th Military Interzone, before joining the maquis of Viet Bac, where he taught at the school of fine arts of the resistance. Professor at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam. Illustrator for the Review « Van Nghe » (Arts and Literature). He specializes in lacquer and oil painting. The influence of graphic art is felt in his simple and clear composition. He is ve y popular because of his illustrations for books and magazines.

Change of shift
Lacquer, 1963, 75 × 100

TRẦN ĐÌNH THỌ

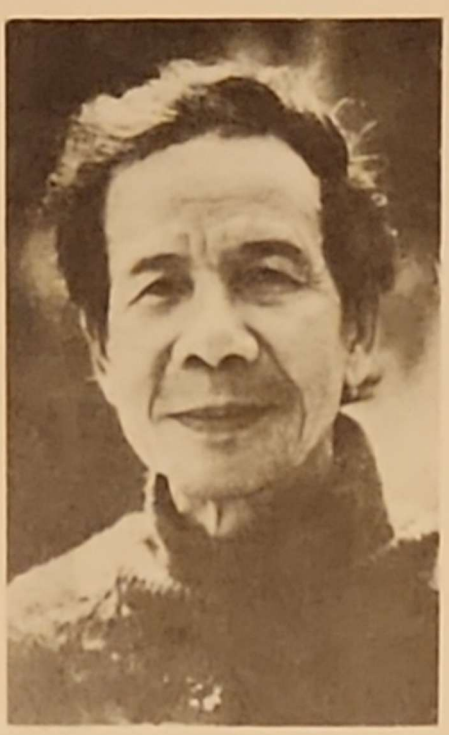
(1919 –)

Night march
Lacquer, 1975,
120 × 160

Born in Haiphong, into a minor civil servant's family. Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Indochina in 1944.

He took part in the people's movement for the popularization of the romanized script, (**quoc ngu**) and in the activities of the Cultural Association for National Salvation (before the August 1945 Revolution) during the first war of resistance. Vice-Director, then Director of the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam. He practises all genres, in particular silk, wood engraving and lacquer, of which he is one of the masters. A classical artist, his best works are of Vietnamese landscape with its characteristic bamboo and banana-trees.

Bamboo
Lacquer, 1957, 41 × 51



NGUYỄN TRỌNG HỢP
(1920 -)

Born in Hanoi. Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Indochina in 1945. A painter with great originality, he combines the techniques of Western painting with an Asiatic style in which the drawing predominates in his works, the contour lines gives a charming impression of ease and absence constraint. His style is at its best in his innumerable sketches

Making fishing-nets
Wood engraving, 1960, 51 × 46

◀ Carrying coal
Wood engraving, 1958, 35 × 50

MAI VĂN NAM
(1921 — 86)

Born in Hue. Studied at the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. During the first war of resistance, he worked in the cultural bureau in the Region of Hanoi and in the 3rd Military Interzone.

He is working for Publishing Houses and for the National Art Workshop. Lacquer allows him to express his deep love for nature and simple people. His works are endowed with a certain kind of charm originating from the sincerity of his inspiration.

By the brook
Lacquer, 1983, 80 × 90

◀ Going to Bac Ha market
Lacquer, 1957, 58 × 94

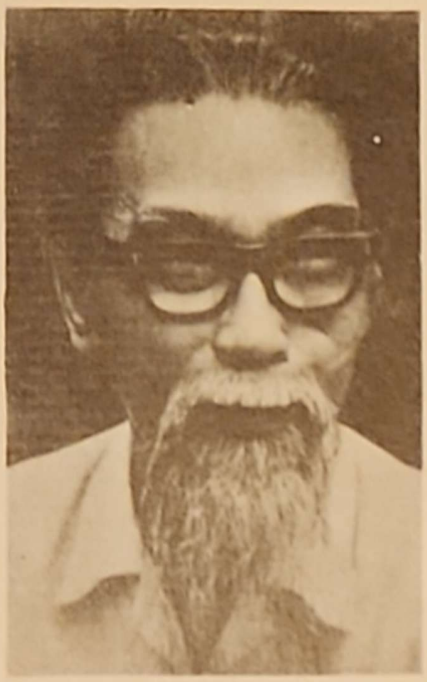
BÙI XUÂN PHÁI

(1921 -)

Born in Hanoi. Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. During the first war of resistance, he worked in the maquis of Viet Bac. Afterwards, he taught at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam. His wood engravings reveal an effort to enrich the popular prints by the effect of spatial values (use of grey tones and effacing the outline traits). of old streets in Hanoi. He is also well-known for his illustrations for books and magazines.

Illustration to a storybook

An old street of Hanoi
Lacquer, 1954, 50 × 68

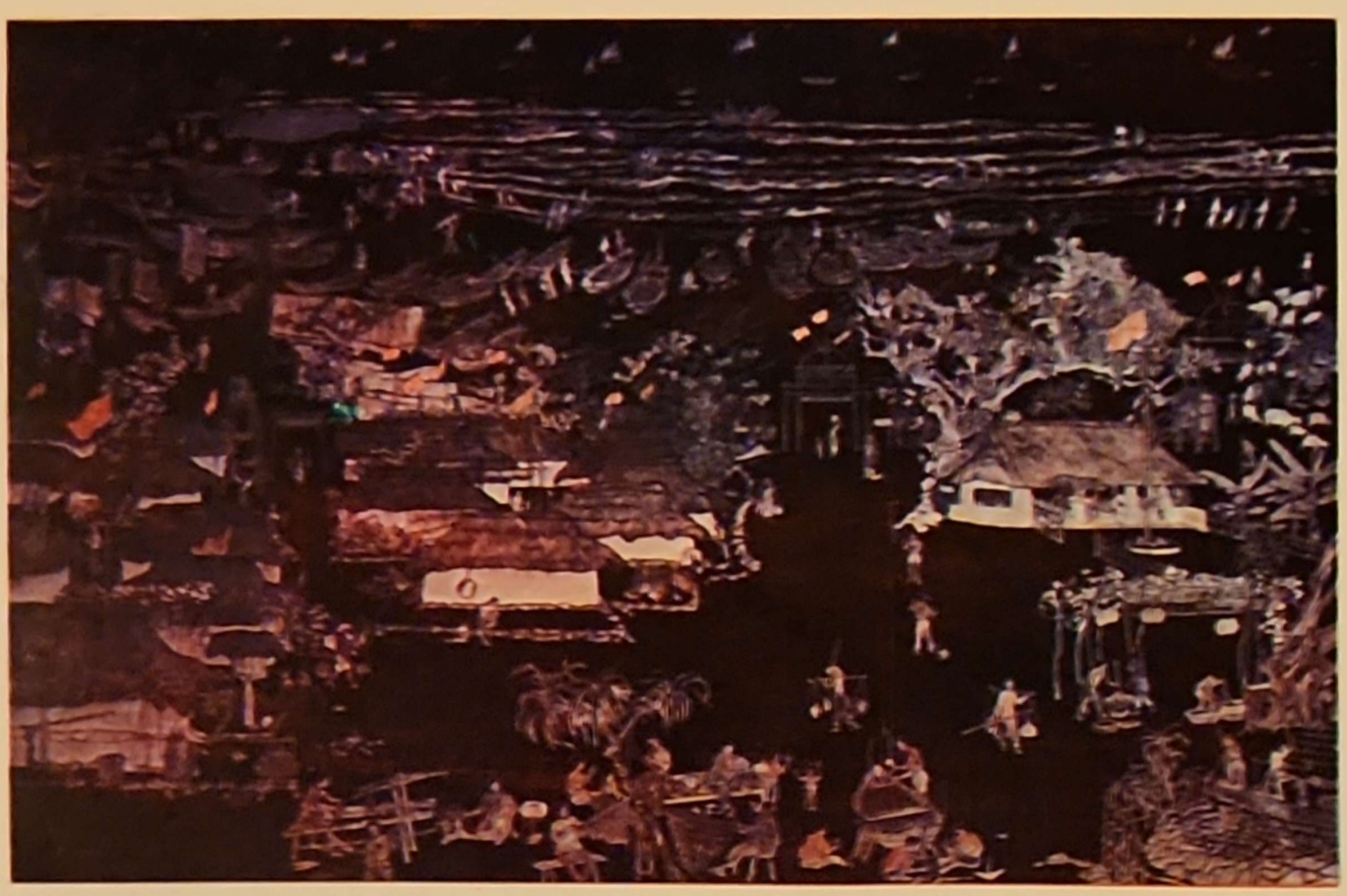


HUỲNH VĂN THUẬN

(1921 -)

Two sisters
Engraved lacquer, 1983,
66 × 40

Born in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Indochina in 1944. During the first war of resistance, he worked in the Bank of Vietnam where he designed banknotes. For many years before joining the Association of Fine Arts of Vietnam as a Vice-Secretary. In 1983 he was Vice-President of the Union of Plastic Artists of Vietnam. He specializes in engraved lacquer and has learned to control the overrichness of details characteristic of this genre so that a living and integral vision emerges.



Vinh Moc hamlet
Engraved lacquer, 1958, 145 × 195

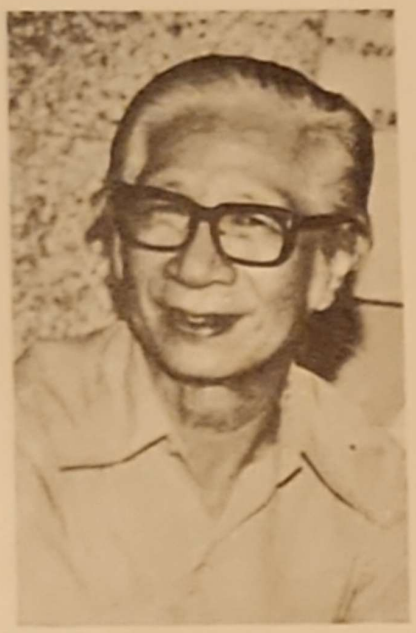
PHAN THÔNG
(1921 - 70)

Born in the former province of Phu Tho.

1940 — 45: Studied at the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. Then attended the School of Fine Arts of the Resistance. He is a painter of movie decors. He practises many genres: oil, silk, watercolour, graphic arts, etc. He has brought innovations to silk paintings developing realistic expression.

Marching in the rain
Silk, 1958, 45 × 63

◀ Phe Vem hamlet
Indian ink, 1962,
40 × 50

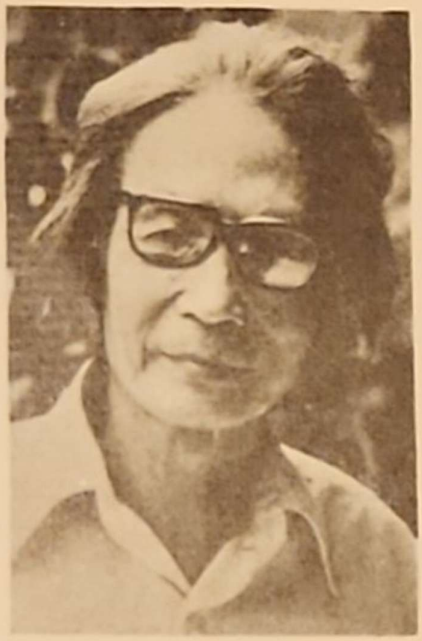


PHẠM ĐĂNG TRÍ
(1921 –)

Born in Hue. Attended the College of Fine Arts of Indochina (Hanoi). He made a name for himself as a painter in Hue where he taught at the College of Fine Arts of that former royal city. Faithful to the traditional techniques and subject-matters (art of the polychrome cloisonné, historical scenes, women, flowers) he paints on silk and on the **do** paper which is silver coloured or covered with shell-fish powder.

Peonies
Lacquer, 1982,
71 × 50 ▶

◀ Silvery stream
Silk, 1944, 54 × 99



KIM ĐỒNG

(Nguyễn Kim Đồng, 1922 –)

Born in Go Vap (Southern Vietnam).

1942 — 45: studied at the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. Before the 1945 Revolution, he drew anti-colonialist posters. During the first war of resistance, he served in the maquis of Viet Bac. Since 1954, he has been teaching lacquer painting at the College of Applied Arts in Hanoi. His works are characterized by sobriety of their composition and colours.

Potters
Lacquer, 1958, 98 × 72

◀ Catching fish
Lacquer, 1960,
73 × 100

HUỲNH VĂN GẤM
(1922 - 87)

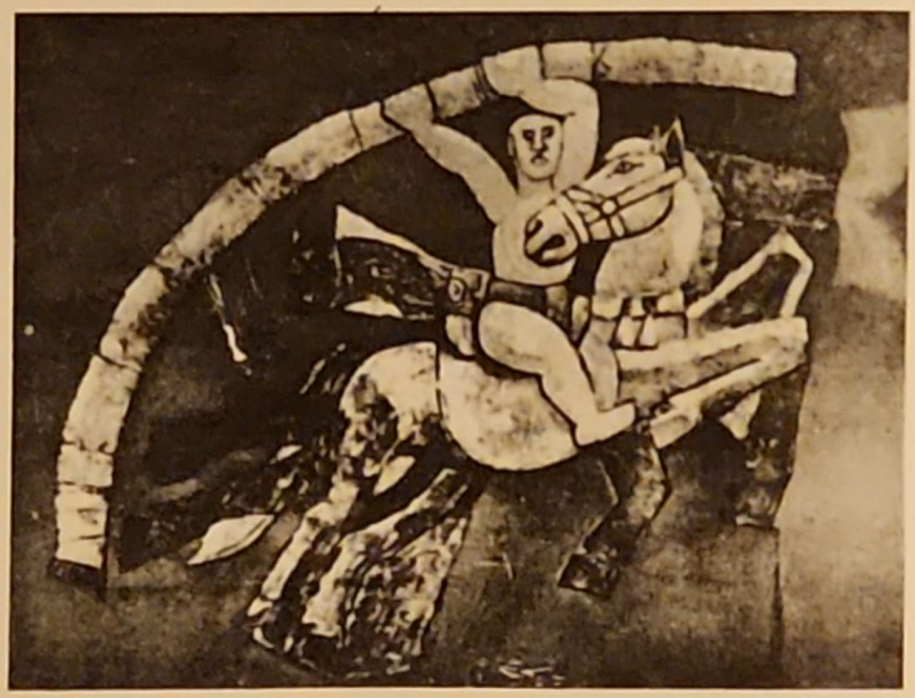
Born in the South of Vietnam (former province of Tan An — Nam Bo). Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Indochina in 1945. He took part in the first war of resistance at Nam Eo Front (1945 — 54). He regrouped to the North where he worked in the Publishing House of Arts and Music. He was a member of the secretariat of the Association of Fine Arts of Vietnam. He has strengthened the realist capacities of the renovated traditional lacquer by treating subject-matters borrowed from contemporary history.

Heart vs gun-muzzle
Lacquer, 1963, 84 × 100

Miss Lien
Lacquer, 1962,
55 × 47

NGUYỄN TƯ NGHIÊM

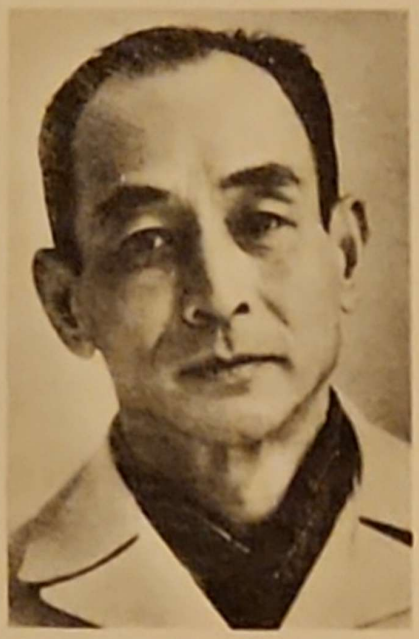
(1922 -)



Giong Genie
Lacquer, 1974,
100 × 134

Born in Nam Dan district, Nghe Tinh province. Came from a patriotic scholar's family. His father, a Doctor of Classical Literature (Pho Bang), gave up his official post as a mandarin. When the August 1945 Revolution broke out, Nguyen Tu Nghiem was in his 4th year of studies at the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. He returned to his native district to work in the Regional People's committee, in charge of social and cultural affairs. During the first war of resistance, he taught at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam which reopened in the maquis of Viet Bac. Since 1954, he has been devoting himself to artistic creation. A specialist of lacquer painting, he excels in revaluing cultural heritage (importance given to outline drawing, rhythm, motifs, warm tones) while remaining open to modern influences. He is very much admired by young artists for his original talent and his efforts in experimentation and research. He is best in engraving and book illustrations. One of the first artists to have tried with success to enrich the palette of lacquer painting by introducing the use of cold tones (blue-green).

Water-buffalo calf
Lacquer, 1957, 45 × 63



PHAN KẾ AN
(1923 -)

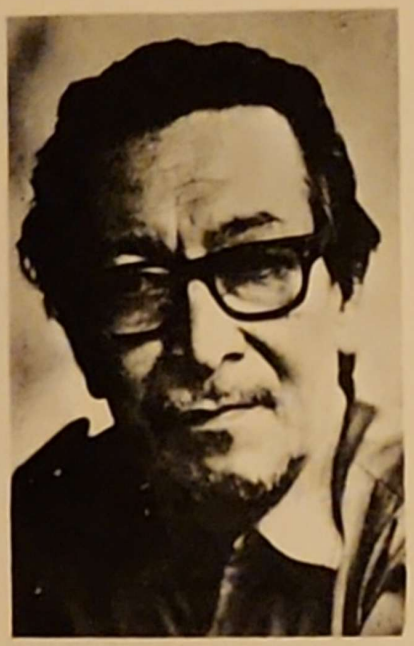
Collusion between the USA and Great Britain
Cartoon, 1960

Born in the former province of Nghe An. Son of Phan Ke Toai, imperial governor of Tonkin who was made Vice-Premier of the people's Government formed by Ho Chi Minh. Student of the College of Fine Arts of Indochina, Phan Ke An took part in the Viet Minh movement even before the August 1945 revolution. During the first war of resistance, he worked as a cultural militant in the Press and the Propaganda Service, signing his satirical drawings with his pen name, "Phan Kich". A pioneer of renovated lacquer painting, he attempted, together with other lacquer-painters, to introduce realistic effects of perspecture and the range of cold tones.

Remembering an evening in the Northwestern region
Lacquer, 1955, 70 × 110

MAI VĂN HIẾN

(1923 –)



Meeting by chance
Gouach, 1951, 60 × 94

Born in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) into a civil-servant's family. Studied at the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. He joined the ranks of the 1945 Revolution. He worked as a militant artist in the People's Army until 1965. Mai Van Hien is mainly successful in oil painting and gouache: he brings flat tints into which by lines which create a certain effect of perspective without making use of plays of light and shapes characteristic of western art. His works are distinguished by their humorous and optimistic approach.

Butterflies along the road
Oil, 1984, 74 × 100

NGUYỄN SÁNG

(1923 –)

Painter's sympathy
Lacquer, 1981,
70 × 110

Born in My Tho (South Vietnam). Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. In 1946, he took part in the first war of resistance in the maquis of Việt Bắc. His works include wood engraving, lacquer, oil paintings... He is one of the masters of modern Vietnamese lacquer painting. His very original style is characterized by an effort towards conceptual synthesis which aims at bringing out the soul of things and the real, the concise intellectualized expression is that of an ascetic bareness which, nevertheless, does not give an impression of austereness. He rarely resorts to the effects of western perspective. His decorative plates in lacquered wood are in great demand.

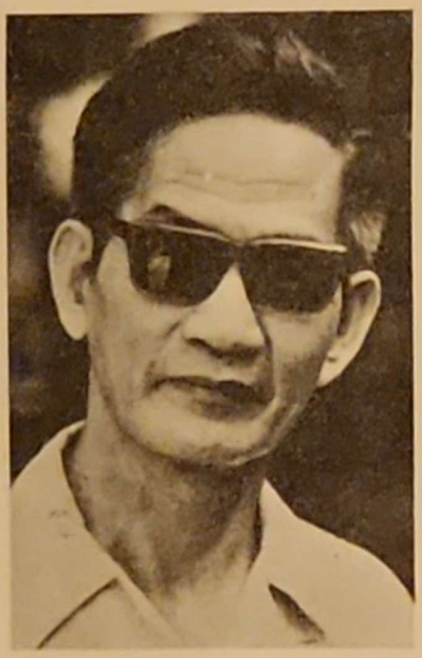
Admitted to the Party at
Dien Bien Phu
Lacquer, 1963, 180 × 120

DƯƠNG BÍCH LIÊN
(1924 –)

A student at the College of Fine Arts of Indochina when the August 1945 Revolution broke out. He finished his studies in 1946. He militated in the maquis of Viet Bac during the first war of resistance. He specializes in lacquer and oil painting, but is also well-known for his illustrations, (books, magazines) and his theatrical decors. With his reflective mind, he creates solid works resulting from patient research.

Uncle Ho on his way to Viet Bac
Lacquer, 1980, 100 × 180

◀ Golden afternoon
Lacquer, 1962, 60 × 90



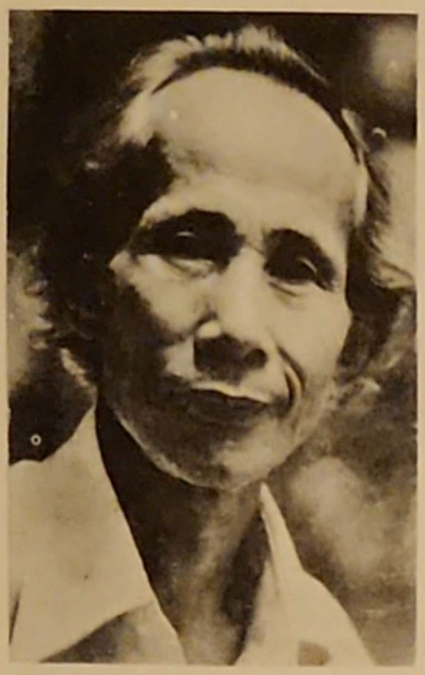
LÊ THANH ĐỨC
(1925 -)

Born in Hanoi. 1942 — 45: studied at the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. A militant artist, he took part in the August 1945 Revolution from the beginning in Hanoi and in both wars of resistance. 1956 — 60: studied in the USSR specializing in film decors. He also practises oil painting and gouache He has brought in appreciable contribution to graphic art and to Vietnamese advertisement design.

He is now working at the Advertisement Company of the Ministry of Foreign Trade (VINEXAD).

Hanoi during the night of liberation
Lacquer, 1954, 50 × 79

◀ Violet afternoon
Gouach, 1981,
68 × 67



THÁI HÀ

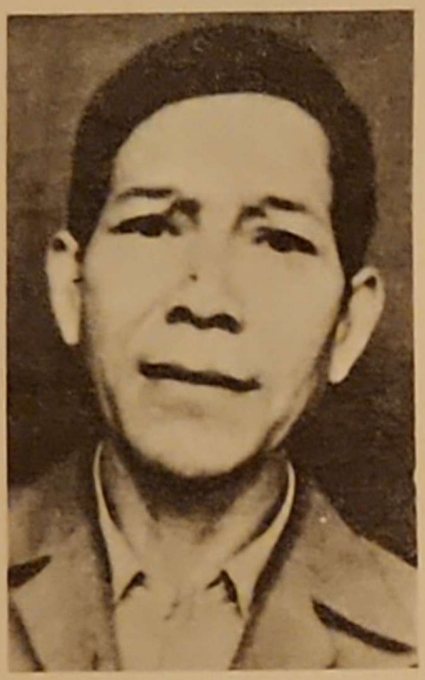
(1925 –)

Young fighters
Sketch, 1964 ▶

His real name is Nguyen Nhu Huan. Born in Tu Son district (Ha Bac). The 1945 August Révolution broke out when he was in his 4th year of studies at the College of Fine Arts of Indochina. He enlisted in the people's army and fought in southern Vietnam (5th Military Interzone) during the first war of resistance. He regrouped to the North according to the Geneva Agreements. He learned decorative art for film production in the USSR. After his return to Vietnam he took part in the fight against the American aggressors in South Vietnam. He is dedicated to lacquer painting. His works, very well-executed, faithfully reflect the people's life and combat in the liberated zone, chiefly in the South high lands.

Mangrove hamlet
Engraved lacquer, 1976, 130 × 90

THE SECOND GENERATION: THE ARTISTS TRAINED BEFORE THE AUGUST 1945 REVOLUTION DURING THE RESISTANCE AGAINST THE FRENCH COLONIALISTS (1946 – 54) OR DURING THE EARLY SIXTIES



XU-MAN
(1921 –)

Born of the Bana ethnic minority, in Gialai-Kontum (Central Highlands). During the first war of resistance he fought in the ranks of the People's Army. After the conclusion of the Geneva Agreements (1954), he was regrouped to the North where he attended the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam (Hanoi) in 1956. In 1963, he gave up his studies to return to the South where he worked as a militant artist during eleven years. In 1974, for reasons of health, he had to return to the North where he completed his artistic studies. He is now working in the office of culture and information of his native province. His oil paintings preserve the simplicity and savour of the Highlands popular creations.

Dawn in the forest of Western High Plateaux
Lacquer, 1976, 122 × 98

◀ Celebration of the anniversary of the Party birthday
Gouach, 1976, 97 × 62

SĨ TỐT
(1922 -)

Children's education
Gouach, 1957, 46 × 66

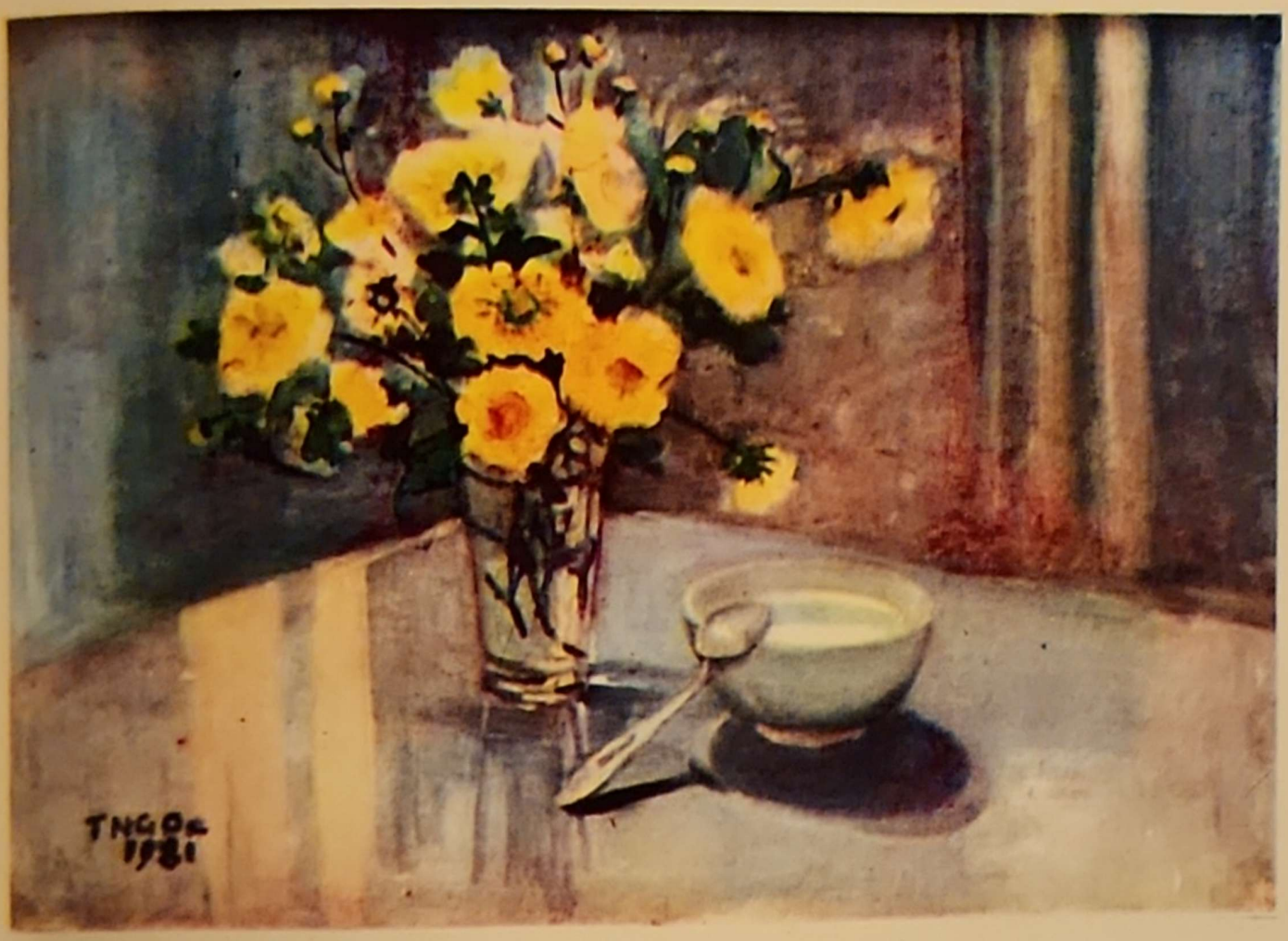
Born in Ha Son Binh province. Enlisted in the people's army during the first war of resistance. He became a military cartographer, which gave him a taste for drawing. When peace was reestablished in 1954, he attended the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam from which he graduated in 1963. He worked at the Cultural Service of Vietnam until his retirement. His oil paintings and gouaches reveal his peasant origin: although they adopt the rudiments of western art, they express a kind of spontaneity and charm proper to the soul of the people.

Monochord
Oil, 1963, 121 × 160

TRẦN THỊ THANH NGỌC

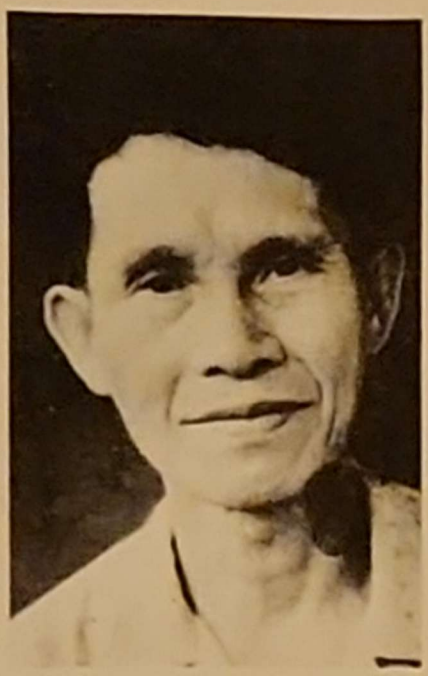
(1925 -)

Born in Hanoi, into a civil servant's family. When a girl, she attended the preparatory course at the College of Fine Arts of Indochina; after she married, she had to give up her studies. Under the people's regime, she resumed her artistic studies: in 1955 although a mother of five children, she entered the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam and graduated in 1963. She was teaching at the school of Applied Arts of Hanoi. Her works in lacquer and silk hold a feminine charm and freshness. With Nguyen Thi Kim, a sculptor, Le Thi Luu, a painter, she belongs to the first generation of Vietnamese women in the plastic arts.



Still life
Silk, 1984

◀ Making a road to Dien Bien
Silk, 1974, 60 × 90



NGUYỄN THẾ VINH

(Nguyễn Vĩnh Nguyên, 1926 –)

Born in Nghia Binh province. 1960 — 65: studied at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam. He took part in both wars of resistance, particularly in the 5th Military Interzone, on the Tay Nguyen Highlands, which inspired most of his creations. His works of lacquer, silk, wood engraving are very close to the people in feeling.

Complementary-education class in the Western High Plateaux
Lacquer, 1974, 60 × 85

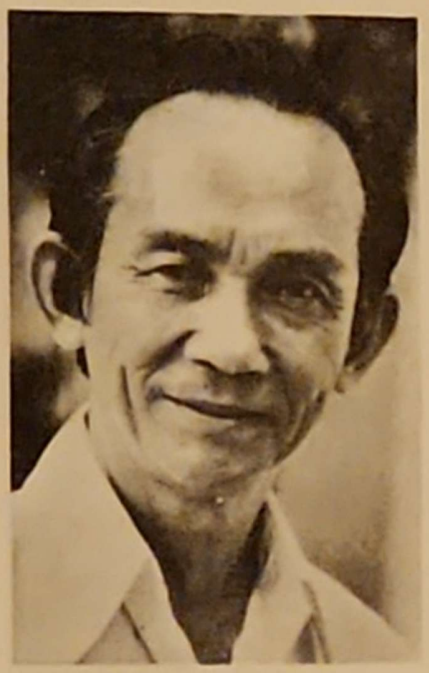
◀ Young Bahna woman
Lacquer, 1973, 85 × 50

VŨ TRUNG LƯƠNG
(1926 -)

Born in Nghia Binh province. A soldier since the August 1945 Revolution, he has devoted himself to cultural activities. 1954: was regrouped to the North. Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam (1966) where he taught until 1977. After the Liberation of the South, he was appointed Director of the College of Fine Arts of Hue. He is known particularly for his graphic works (lithographs, wood engravings, etc.).

Night in Dalat
Litograph, 1976, 40 × 56

◀ A bang tree at the entrance to the hamlet
Wood engraving, 1972, 35 × 40



HUỲNH PHƯƠNG ĐÔNG

(1927 -)

Real name: Huynh Cong Nhan. Born in Binh Hoa, Gia Dinh, a province in the South. 1927 — 41: attended the School of Applied Arts of Gia Dinh. 1945: took part in the Revolution and then in the first war of resistance. 1954: was regrouped to the North; his studies at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam were interrupted in 1963 when he enlisted to fight against the American aggressors in the South. Since the liberation of the South, he has been living in Ho Chi Minh City. He is famous for his numerous drafts and sketches (watercolours, pastels, pencil drawings) paintings of combat and of people's lives in the maquis in South Vietnam. This rich experience has enable him to develop his works with a wider scope.

Fighting group
Lacquer, 1980,
81 × 121

Comrade-in-arms
Oil, 1980, 80 × 150

ĐẶNG ĐỨC SINH
(1927 –)

Illustration
Wood engraving ▶

Born at Thanh Oai (now part of the suburbs of Hanoi). 1961 — 66: educated at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam in Hanoi. Took part in both wars of resistance (art and literary section). He is particularly known for his sketches of Laos. Chiefly specialises in oil painting and illustrations for newspapers and magazines. Prefers to depict the revolution or resistance with a taste for elaborate research.

Crossing the Mu Gia Pass
Gouach, 1980, 87 × 62

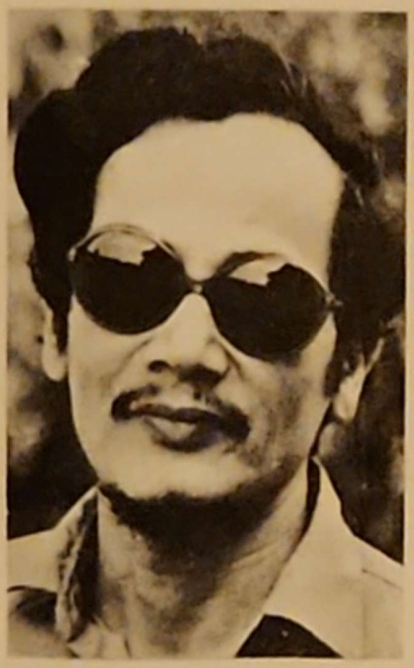
VĂN ĐA

(Nguyễn Văn Đa, 1928 -)

Woman fighter
Oil, 1977 ▶

At the beginning of the first war of resistance, he enlisted in the People's Army and began to draw for regiment or division newspapers. After the re-establishment of peace in 1954, he attended the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam graduating in 1963. He became a painter at the art workshop of the people's army. He is a military officer who prefers to express softness and human tenderness, qualities highly prized by any combatant rather than combat scenes. Has mastered oil painting techniques of the West but retains his own personality. The influence of impressionism is felt in his works. He also draws for newspapers and magazines.

Cham Isthmus
Oil, 1980, 60 × 80



TRẦN LƯU HẬU
(1928 -)

Born in Hanoi. 1950 — 54: Was educated at the College of Fine Arts of the resistance established in the maquis of Viet Bac. 1956 — 62: Studied art in Moscow especially theatrical decor. Now teaches at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam in Hanoi. His excellent silk paintings and wood engraving, depict the landscapes and life of mountain ethnic minorities.

Sewing clothes
Gouach, 1980, 61 × 79

◀ Crossing the old hamlet
Silk, 1974, 60 × 90

HOÀNG TRẦM

(1928 -)

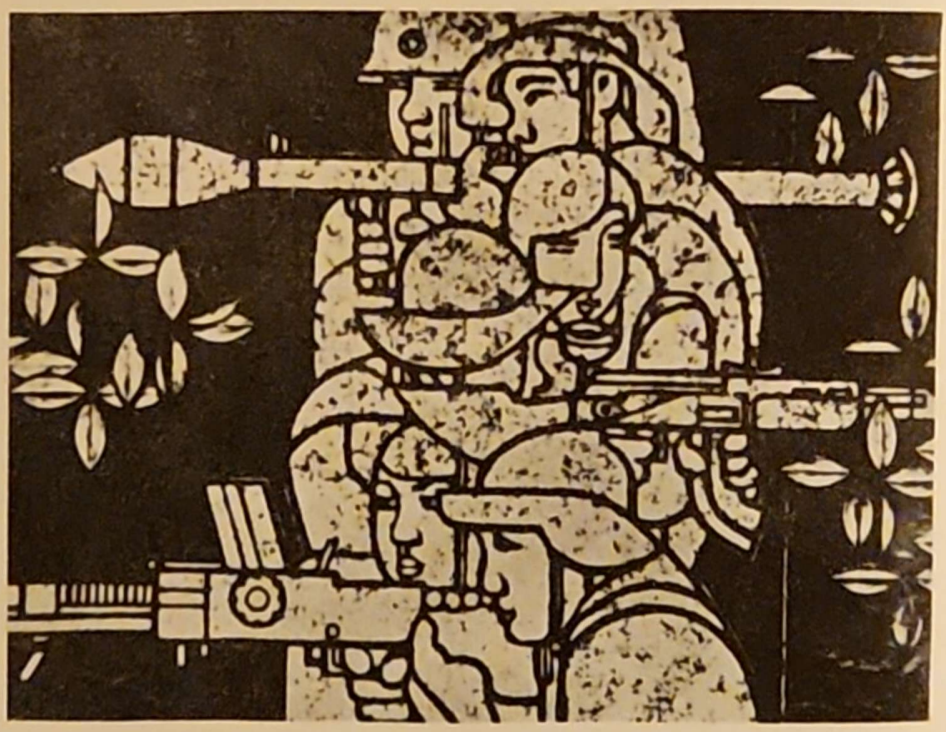
Three generations
Wood engraving, 1970, ▶
54 × 40

Born in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). Graduated from the secondary school of Applied Arts of Gia Dinh before the 1945 Revolution. He joined the maquis in 1947 during the first war of resistance. Served first as propaganda drawer, illustrator then as a combatant. Was regrouped to the North in 1954. 1957 — 63: studied at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam where he taught after his graduation. 1975: returned to the South after reunification. Heads the oil section at the College of Fine Arts of Ho Chi Minh City. He mainly excels in lacquer painting and wood engraving. Pays special attention to drawing and the composition.

Fighter's mother
Lacquer, 1980, 123 × 137

QUANG THỌ

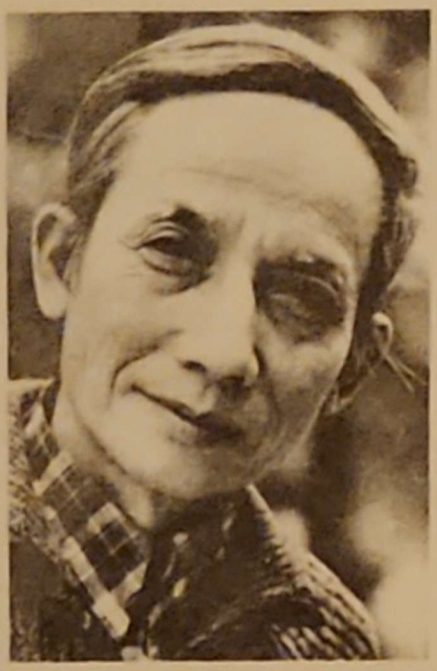
(Nguyễn Quang Thọ, 1929 –)



Monument for the unknown soldier
Lacquer, 1980,
90 × 120

Born in Hanoi. He participated in the 1945 Revolution from the very first days. He enlisted in the people's army at the beginning of the first war of resistance (West Regiment). Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam in 1963, and continued to serve in the Army. During the second war of resistance, he fought in the most dangerous part of the front. A military painter, he portrays the combatant in all of his activities and is a persevering researcher, has tried his skill in many genres.

Spring sunshine
Oil, 1975, 81 × 122



NGUYỄN THỤ
(1930 –)

Mother and child
Silk, 1977, 68 × 48

A native of Hoai Duc district, Ha Son Binh province. Enlisted in the people's army at the age of 18. Showed a gift for drawing and followed short-term training courses. Drawing for military newspapers. 1955 — 62 : studied at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam and became a professor there, then the Vice-Director. Specialist of silk-painting. He is regarded as a brilliant continuator of Nguyen Phan Chanh from whom he differs in that he shows more imagination and freedom. A lover of the mountain region with its ethnic minorities, he tries to express the charm of its landscapes, of its women and children with a lyricism full of tenderness. He also practises wood engraving.

Crossing the old hamlet
Silk, 1970, 60 × 90

GIÁNG HƯƠNG

(Vũ Giáng Hương, 1930 –)

Fishing co-operative
Silk, 1960, 84 × 62

Born in 1930. Daughter of Vu Ngoc Phan, a literary critic and folklorist, and Hang Phuong, a poetess. Fond of drawing since childhood, she studied at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam, from which she graduated in 1962. She taught there and became its Vice-Director. Her silk paintings represent various aspects of people's life and combat. Her favourite subjects are women. Her works, with their clear and simple conception, remain faithful to the tradition of Vietnamese silk painting introduced by Nguyen Phan Chanh.

Marching through Truong Son range
Silk, 1973, 70 × 110

HUY TOÀN

(Lê Huy Toàn, 1930 –)

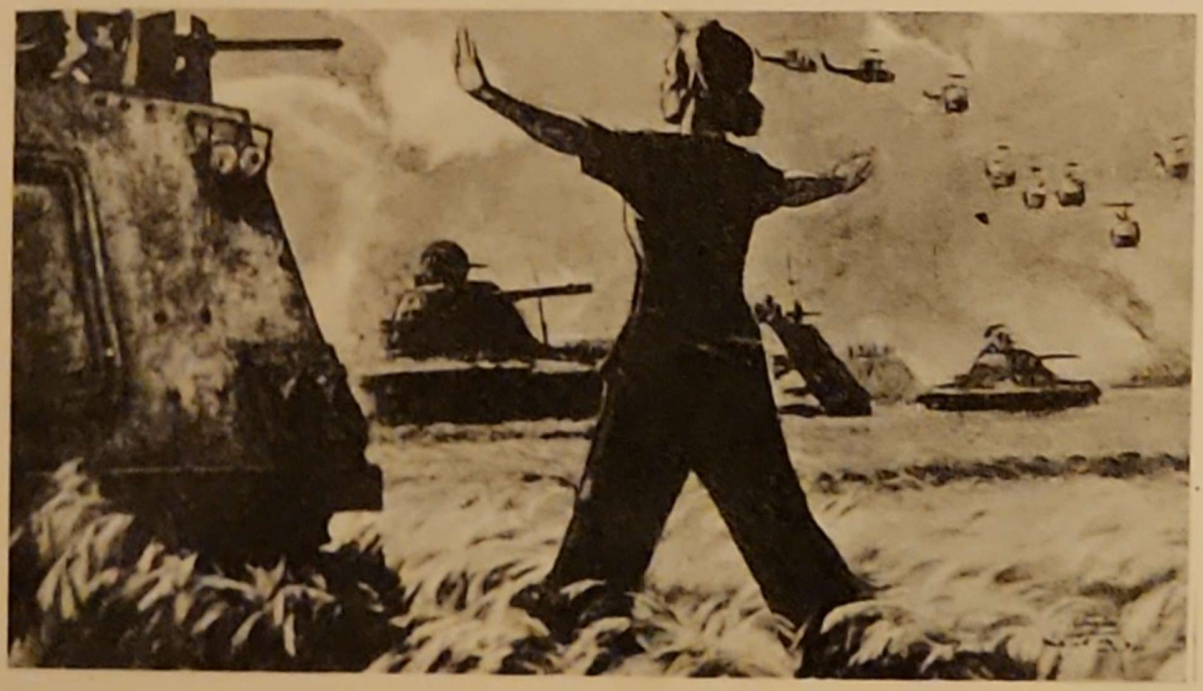
At the centre of Dien Bien Phu
Wood engraving,
1958, 28 × 40

Born in Gia Lam, Hanoi. He enlisted in the people's army at the age of 17 at the beginning of the first war of resistance. While working in the propaganda section, he took an interest in drawing and learned painting by himself. He has continued his artistic activities in the army as an illustrator for the magazine "Arts and Literature of the People's Army." His graphic works, very well-known both to military combatants and the general public, represent scenes of battle in a realistic style. He has also tried his skill at the composition of frescos.

One chapter in our anti-US cause
Monumental, 1980, 120 × 180

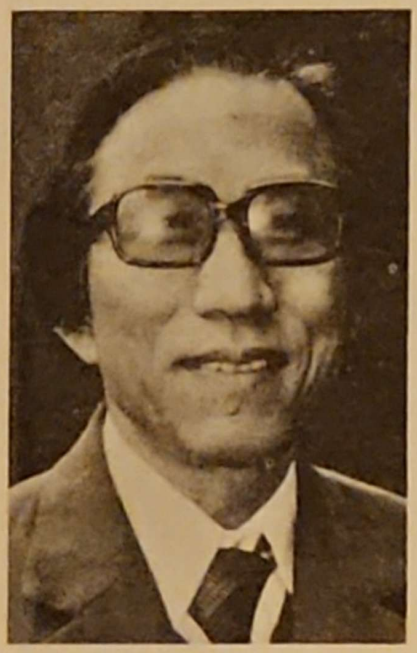
LÊ LAM
(1931 -)

Born in Hanoi. Graduated from the school of fine arts of the resistance (maquis of Viet Bac) in 1953. Drew for the Cinema and Photo Service and for various newspapers and magazines. 1958 — 63: Studied painting in the USSR. 1965: Head of the section of graphic arts of Hanoi. 1965 — 73: took part as an artist in the struggle for the Liberation of South Vietnam, which resulted in a series of sketches of great documentary value. 1979: Director of the National Art Workshop. He chiefly succeeds in graphic art (sketches, water-colours, serigraphs, wood engravings, zincographs, etc.). He delights in conveying the plastic charm of feminine beauty. He also likes to illustrate classical literary works.



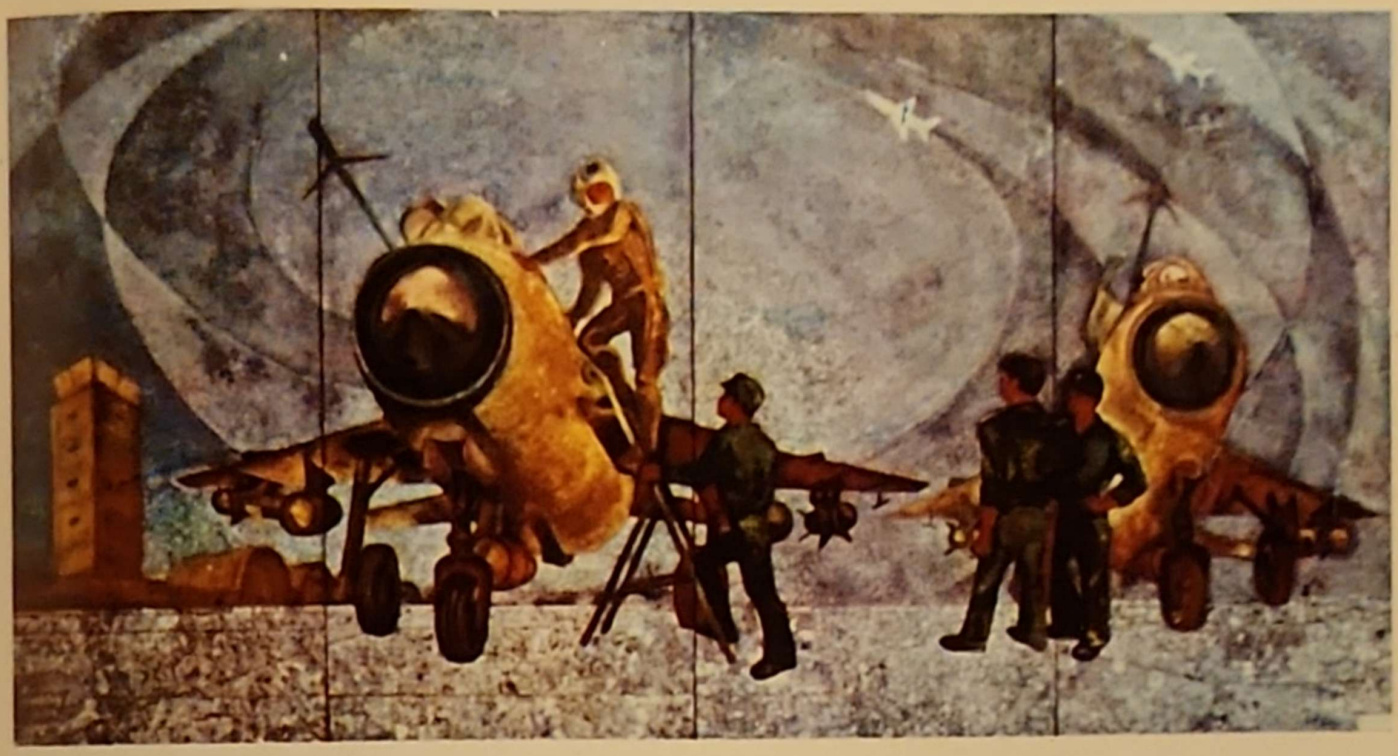
Poetess Ho Xuan Huong
Wood engraving, 1980, 30 × 40 ▶

◀ Stop !
Oil, 1984, 140 × 250



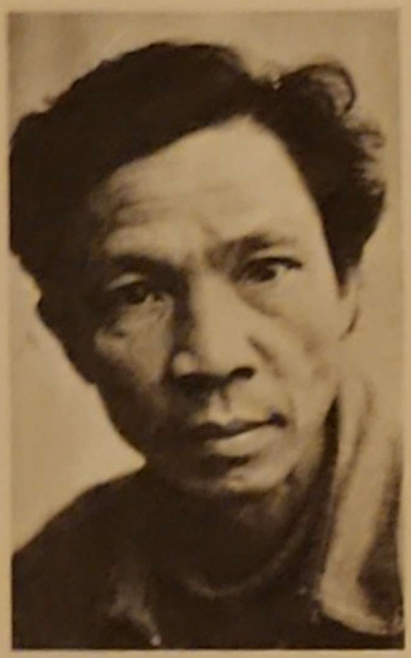
DƯƠNG VIÊN
(1932 -)

Born in Quynh Luu district (Nghe Tinh province). Enlisted in the people's army in 1948. A regular military officer he devotes his gift for drawing to the service of army newspapers. Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam in 1970. He practises lacquer and silk paintings, wood engraving. He prefers scenes of military life. 1983 : general secretary of the Plastic Artists Union of Vietnam.



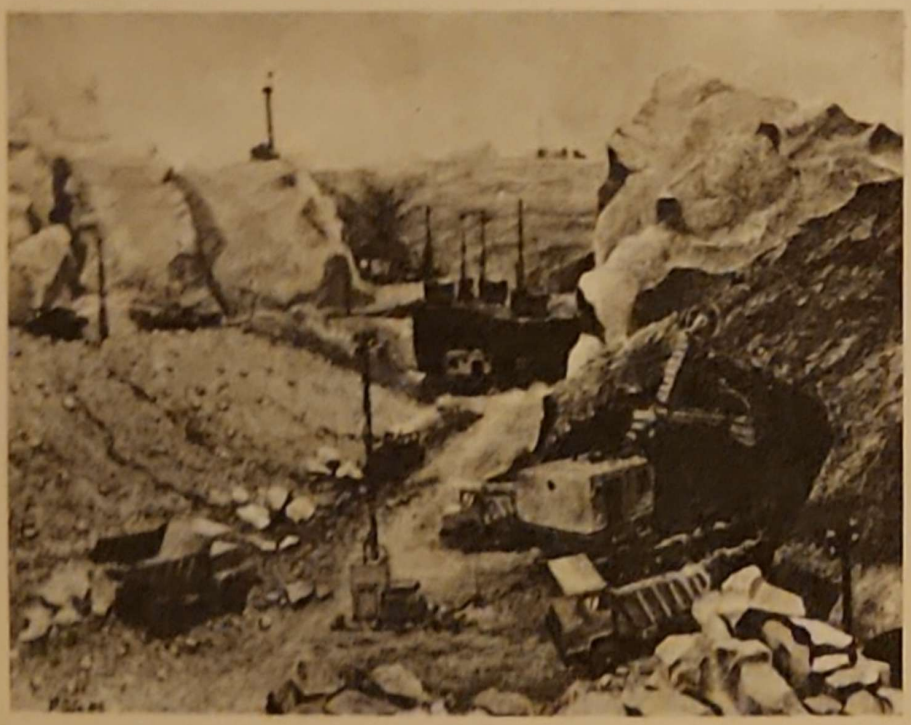
Belief
Lacquer, 1980, 152 × 305

◀ Meeting,
Lacquer, 1983,
78 × 100

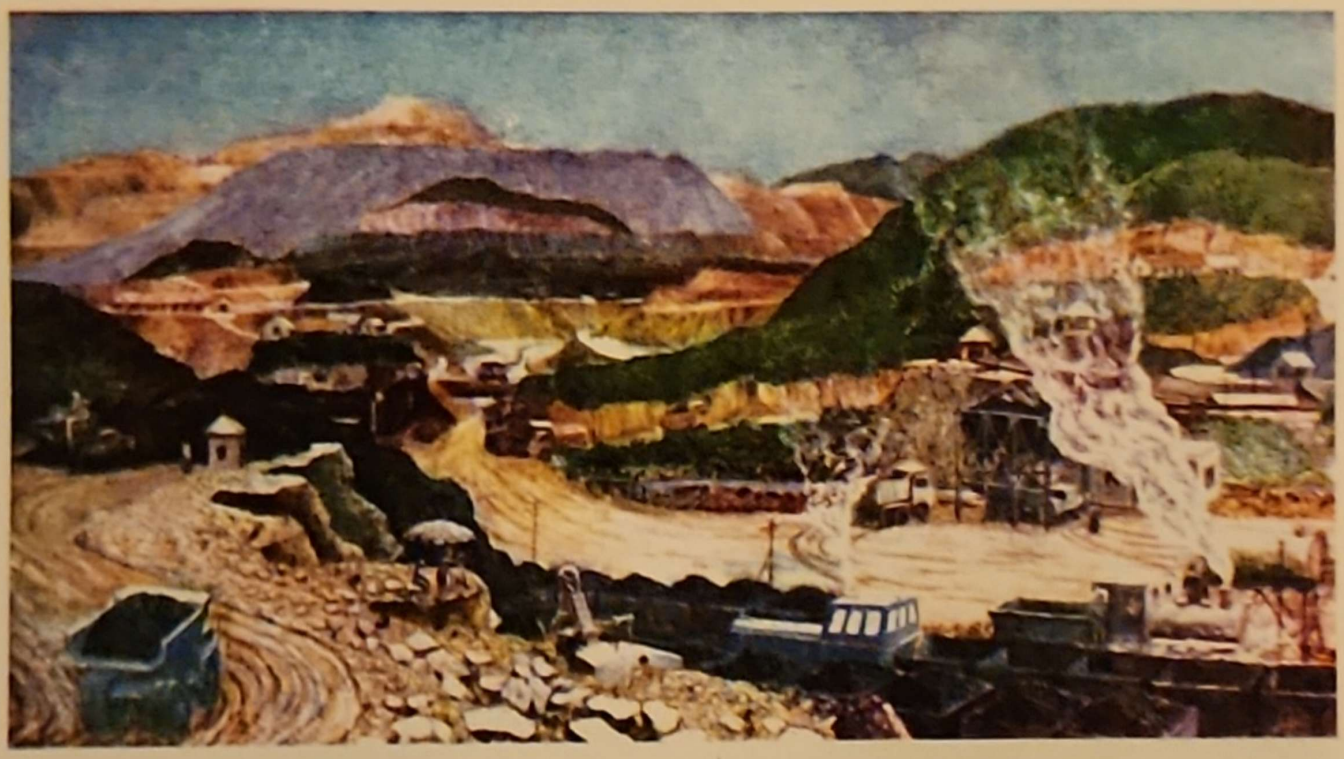


NGÔ PHƯƠNG CÚC
(1933 -)

Born in Thai Binh. He left his native town occupied by the enemy to enlist in the people's army. Demobilized in 1955 he worked as a carpenter in the Ha Tu coal mine. Became acquainted with painting in 1966 due to lessons given by the students of the College of Fine Arts, who were on tour in that region. A passionate self-taught artist who creates oil paintings in his own style: meticulous execution combined with a certain charming unskilled, artless expression.



Coal yard
Oil, 1980, 61 × 113



Vehicles to the coal pits
Oil, 1980, 61 × 113

NGUYỄN TRỌNG KIỆM
(1934 -)

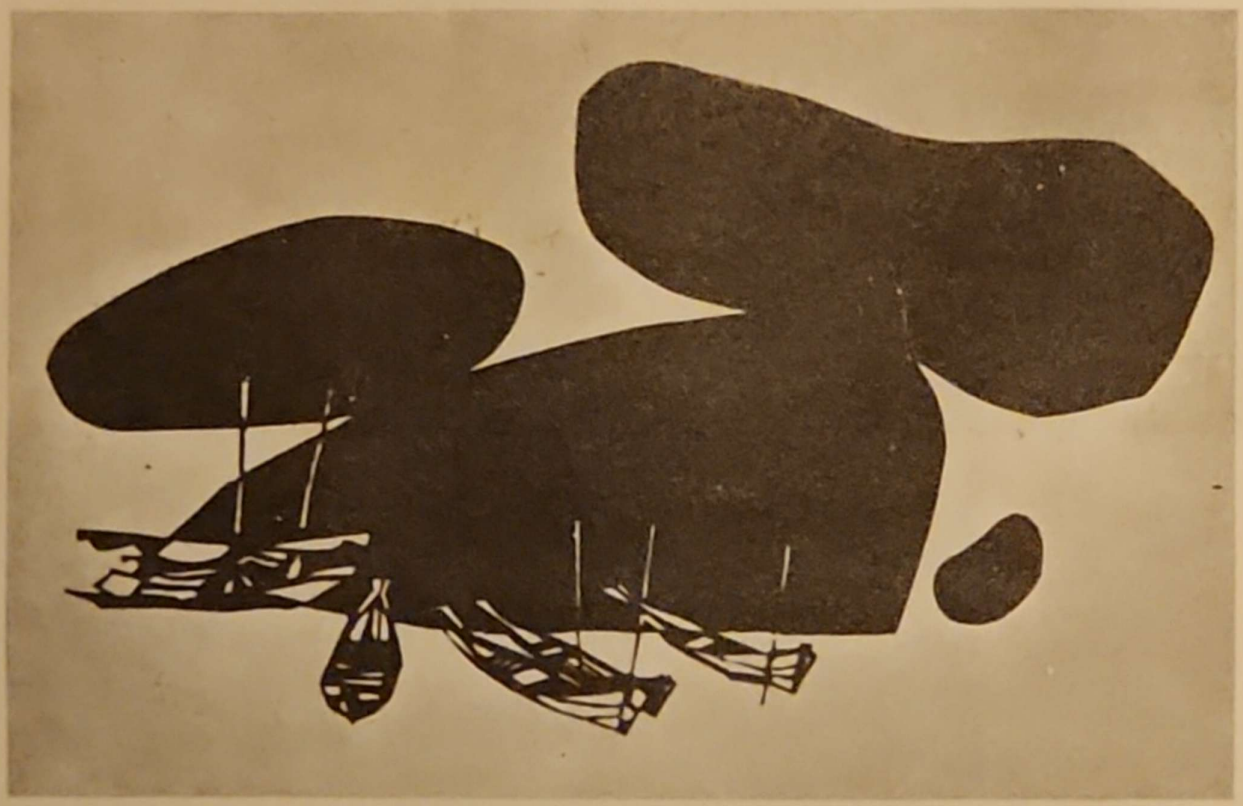
Born in the former province of Hung Yen. 1950 — 54 : studied at the School of Fine Arts of the Resistance. Teaches at the School of Applied Arts of Hanoi. He devotes himself to oil and silk painting. Remains rather traditional in his silk paintings but tries to innovate in his oil paintings, by grafting abstract elements upon a realistic background. His palette is characterized by the sobriety of colours.

Old militiamen
Oil, 1976, 100 × 120

◀ Returning to the native place
Silk, 1960, 50 × 70

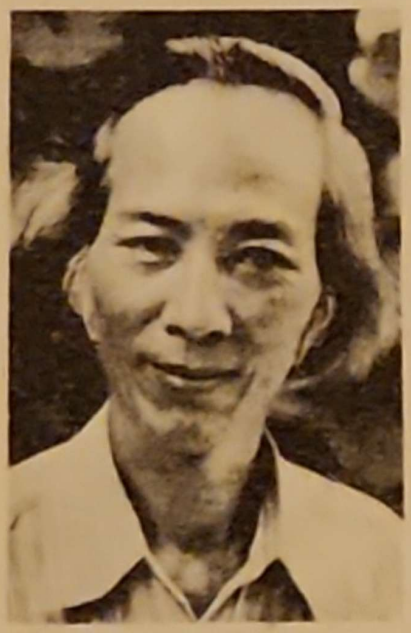
VŨ DUY NGHĨA
(1935 -)

Born in Cam Pha (Quang Ninh). After his painting studies in the country, he attended the Institute of Fine Arts of Moscow. Teaches at the College of Applied Arts of Hanoi. He is known for his graphic works (wood engravings, paper-cut-out). His wood engravings show his effort towards a strict economy of means (lines, colours, composition) so as to catch the essence of the subject and concentrate expression.



At the entrance to the coal pit
Woodcut, 1978, 30 × 40

◀ Husband and Wife Islets
Papercut, 1979

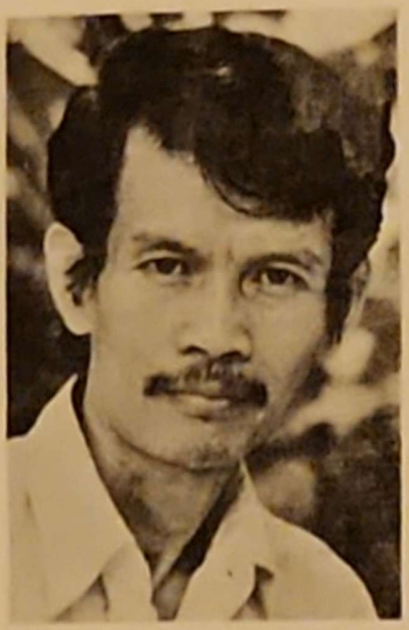


ĐỖ HỮU HUỀ
(1935 -)

Morrison's flame
Woodcut, 1965, 19 × 37 ▶

Born in Ha Bac province. After graduating from the secondary School of Fine Arts, he studied at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam (Hanoi) at which he is now a professor of painting. He specializes in oil painting and wood engraving with a realistic style.

Uncle Ho visiting an infant class
Oil, 1984, 45 × 65



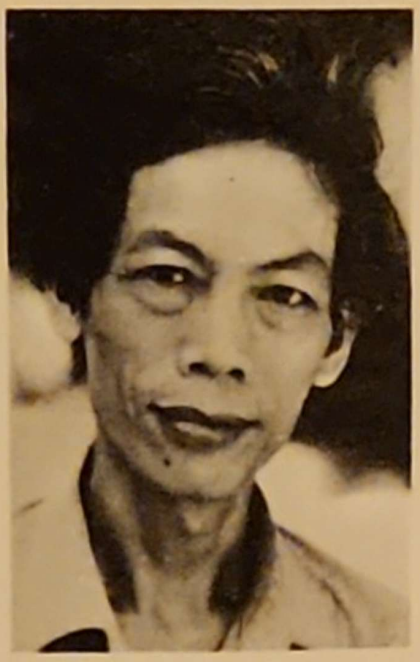
ĐINH TRỌNG KHANG

(1935 -)

Born in Ha Nam Ninh province. 1960: graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam (Hanoi) where he now teaches. Has tried his skill at many genres — gouache, silk painting, prints, but is particularly known for his oil paintings. His best works are permeated with a discreet charm.

Mother and daughter
Woodcut, 1964, 30 × 40

Still life
Oil, 1984, 45 × 65



TRẦN HUY OÁNH
(1937 -)

Born in the former province of Ha Nam, into a poor peasant family. After his secondary studies, he earned his living by making portraits from photographs. 1963: graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam at which he is now a Professor. He practises different genres, from wood engravings to oil paintings. He is remarkable for his spontaneous approach and vigourous expression.

Grandpa and granddaughter
Woodcut, 1964, 30 × 40

Ham Rong bridge under repair
Lacquer, 1970, 152 × 99

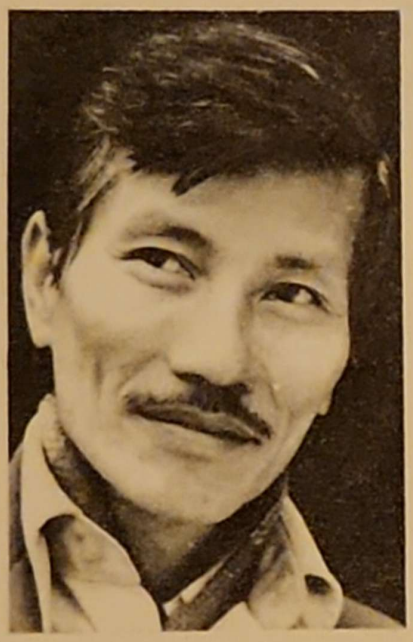
LÊ THỊ KIM BẠCH
(1938 -)

Young ladies making carpets ▶
Silk, 1973, 70 × 105

Born in the former province of Tan An (South Vietnam). A liaison agent during the first war of resistance. She joined the North in 1954. Studied at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam. She teaches at the School of Applied Arts of Hanoi. Silk paintings and mosaics are her specialities, she combines feminine softness with boldness in the execution and composition.

Mother and her little son
Oil, 1980, 80 × 80

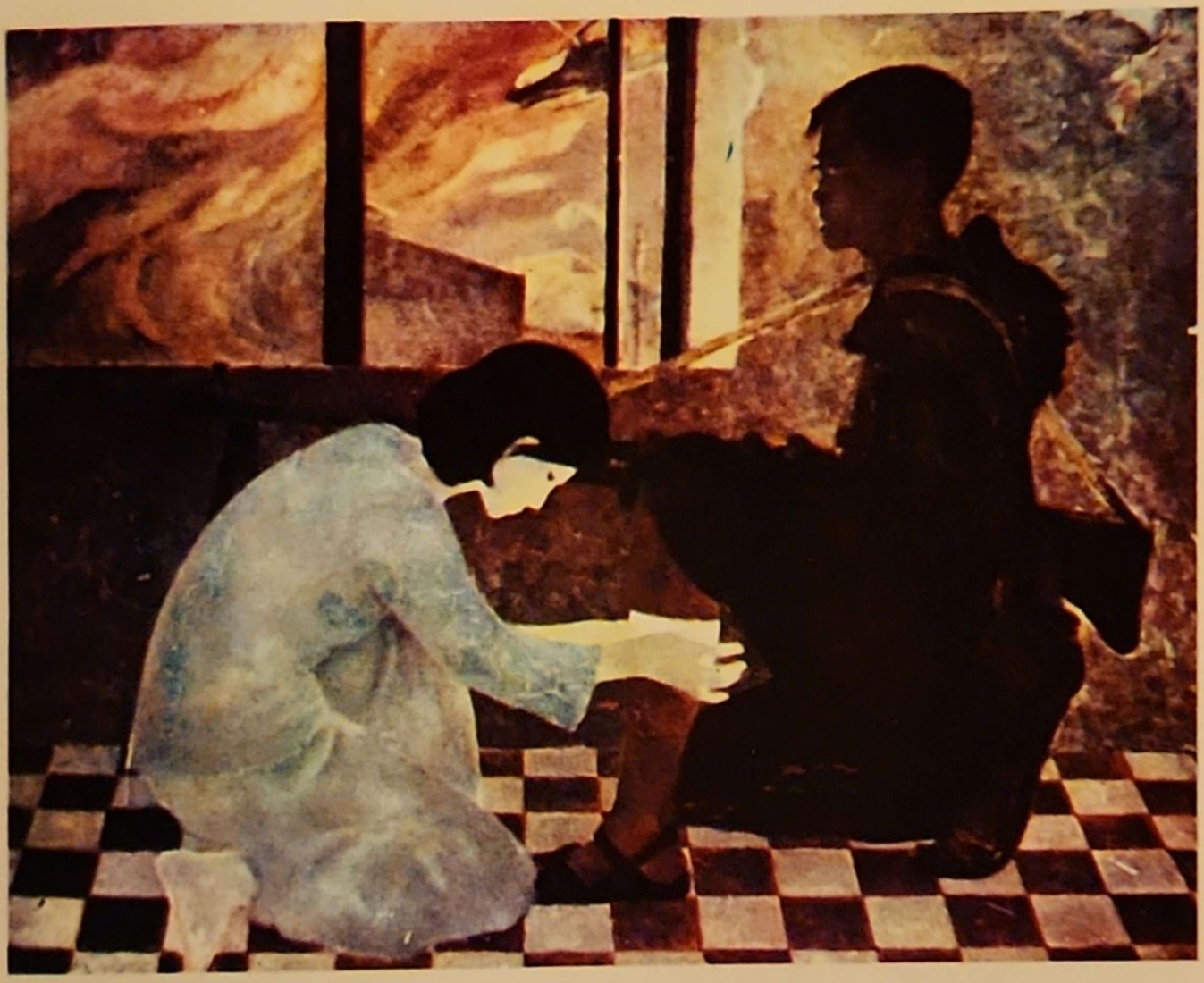
THE YOUNGER GENERATION: THOSE WHO WERE TRAINED DURING THE RESISTANCE AGAINST AMERICAN AGGRESSION (1960 – 75) AND SINCE THE NATIONAL REUNIFICATION (1975)



CỔ TẤN LONG CHÂU
(1938 -)

Ready for fighting
Water colour, 1969 ▶

Born in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). Graduated from the School of Applied Arts of Gia Dinh. Under the American occupation, he took part in the patriotic movement of students and school children in South Vietnam (1955 — 61). He participated in the maquis until the liberation of Saigon. During that period he was known for his many sketches of battles. The end of the war opened new possibilities to his art and his works show a tendency towards a more decoration style.



Girl dressing a fighter's wound
Oil, 1980, 120 × 150

QUÁCH PHONG

(Quách Văn Phong, 1938–)

Born in the former province of Vinh Long (Southern Vietnam). 1951: studied at the School of Applied Arts of Gia Dinh. 1954: regrouped to the North. 1955 — 63: studied at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam. He gave up his studies to go South to fight against the American aggressors. Since the liberation of the South, he has been working at the Association of Fine Arts of Ho Chi Minh City. His oil paintings deal with subjects taken from the people's life and struggles.

August sunshine
Gouach, 1976, 60 × 40

◀ Harvest in Cu Chi area
Lacquer, 1976, 123 × 244

THANH CHÂU

(Nguyễn Thanh Châu, 1939 -)

Born in Dong Thap province (Plain of Reeds in South Vietnam). 1952 — 54 : took part in the first war of resistance. 1954 : regrouped to the North. Studied at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam. 1967 — 75 : took part in the second war of resistance. He works in the Association of Fine Arts (Section Ho Chi Minh City). Most of his works (oil, silk) are battle scenes.

Late days of April
Silk, 1975, 60 × 80

◀ On various stages of the campaign
Silk, 1977, 80 × 100

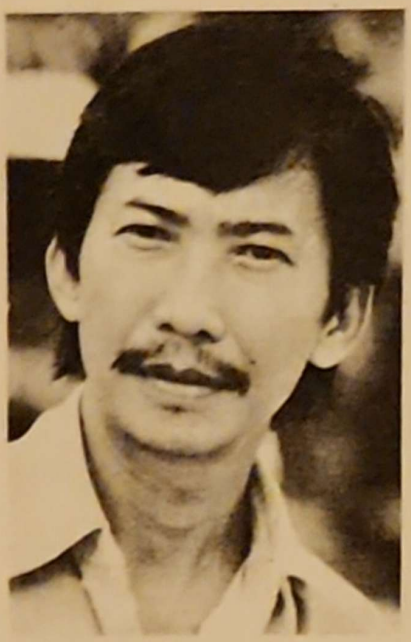
PHẠM NGUYỆT NGA

(1940 -)

Little girl drinking
Woodcut, 1968, 23 × 18 ▶

Born in Hanoi. A gifted self-taught painter, she has devoted herself to an artistic career since 1962, helped by painters of talent. She practices almost exclusively engraving in which she shows her technical mastery. Her favourite subjects are chiefly children, women and landscapes which she treats with an exquisite feminine charm. With the exception of the soft harmony of tones, the boldness of lines, the simplicity of shapes and the clarity in the composition all recall the traditional print to which she remains entirely faithful.

Game of chess
Woodcut, 1978, 18 × 24



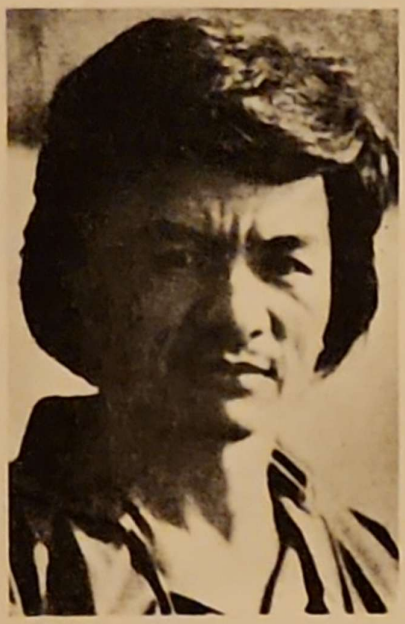
NGUYỄN TRUNG.

(Nguyễn Thanh Trung, 1940 -)

Mother, her daughter and the sea
Oil, 1980, 100 × 150

Born in the former province of Soc Trang (Southern Vietnam). Graduated from the School of Fine Arts of Gia Dinh in 1962. After the liberation of Saigon, he collaborated with the magazine **Van Nghe** (Arts and Literature) of Ho Chi Minh City. His oil paintings show an effort toward original research.

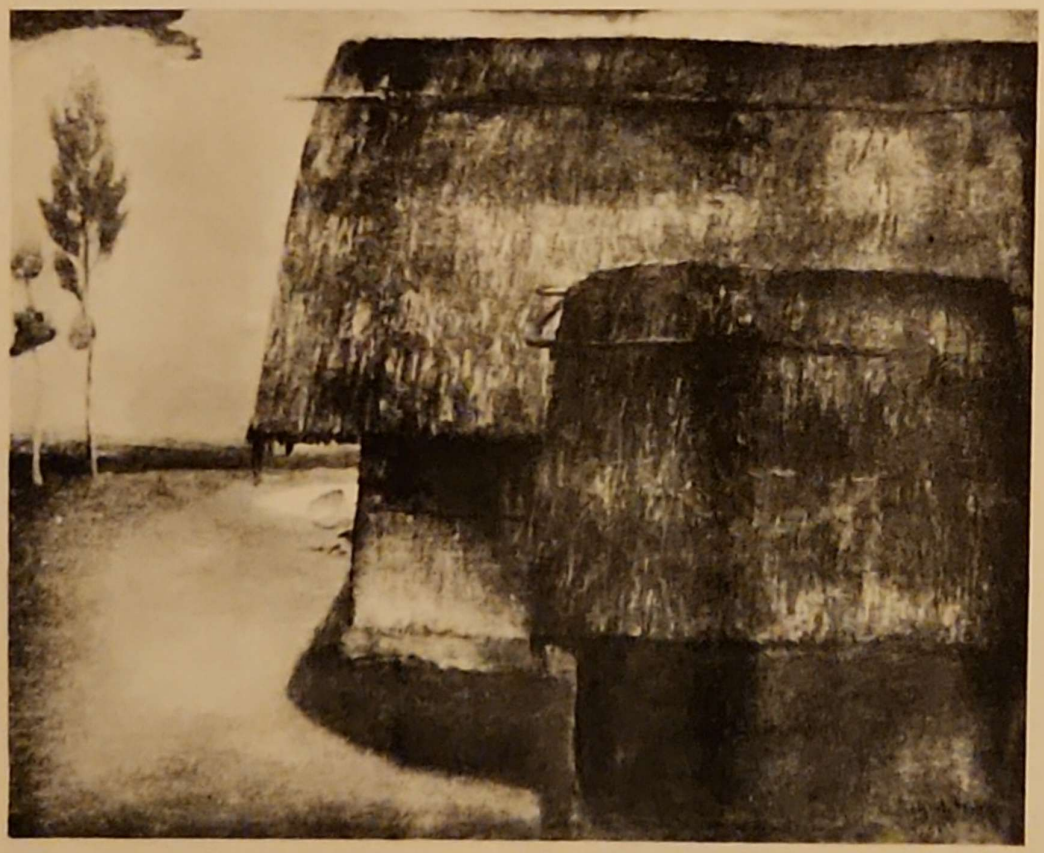
Portrait of a fighter
Oil, 1984, 130 × 97



NGUYỄN PHƯỚC

(Nguyễn Hữu Phước, 1943 –)

Born at Go Vap (Gia Dinh, South Vietnam). Graduated from the School of Applied Arts of Gia Dinh, and then from the College of Fine Arts of the Saigon regime (1965). After the liberation of Saigon, he cooperated with the people's power and became a member of the Plastic Artists' Association of Vietnam (1981). His oil paintings are noticeable for their play of shapes and of light and shade.



Ceramic making
Oil, 1980, 80 × 95

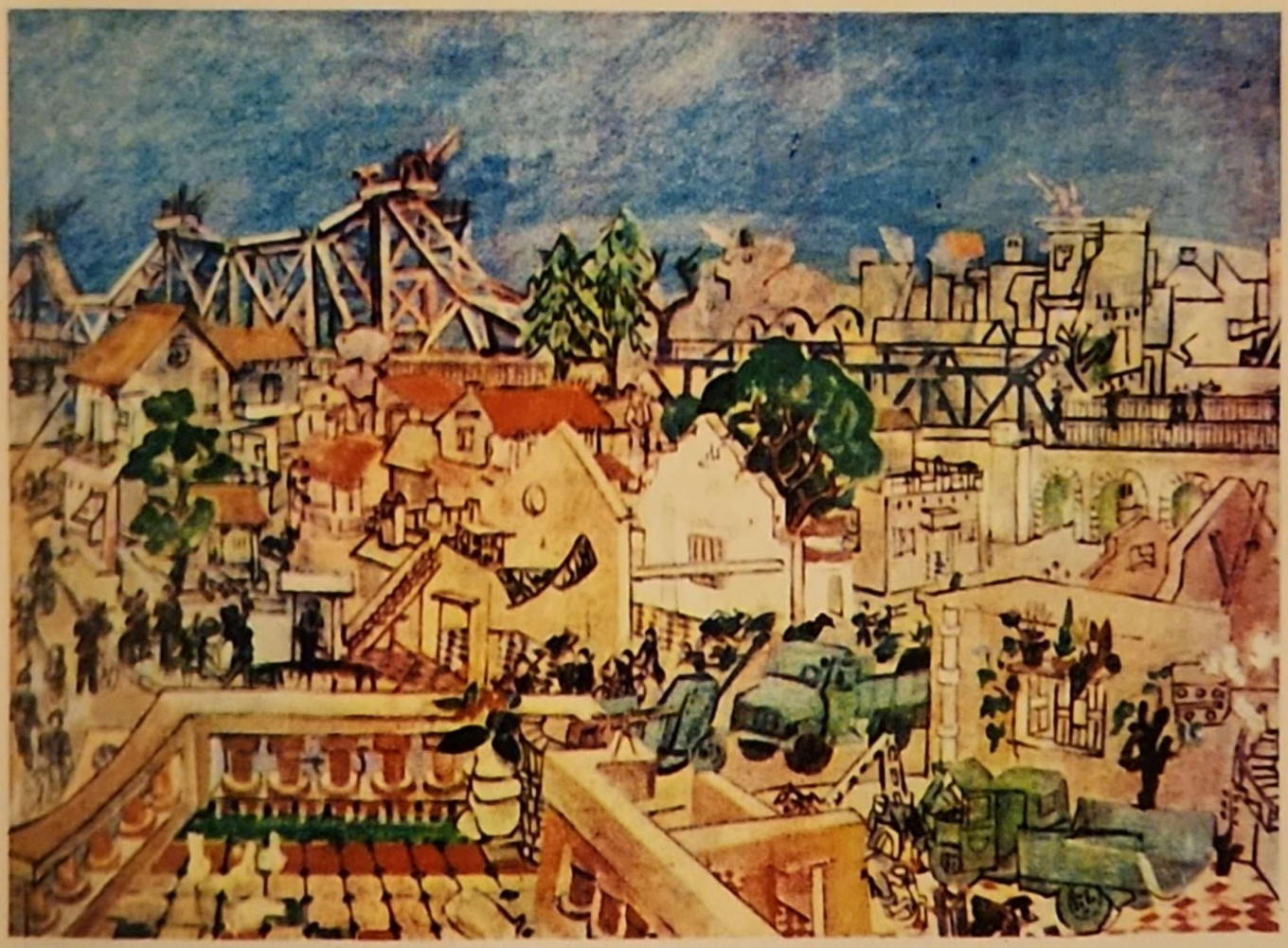
◀ Rural landscape
Oil, 1983, 110 × 80

NGUYỄN THỊ KIM THÁI

(1943 –)

Portrait
Lacquer, 1977, ▶
30 × 40

Born in the chief town of the former province of Bac Ninh. Graduated from the Secondary School of Applied Arts (1963), she illustrated medicinal plants for the Ministry of Health. She studied at the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam from 1967 to 1972, during the period of intensive American bombing. Nevertheless, her first works are characterized by an astonishing impression of serenity. She teaches at the Institute of Applied Arts of Hanoi. She mainly succeeds in oil painting. Her works, characterized by a decorative taste, breathe freshness, chiefly because of her use of soft tones (blue-white). Her favourite subjects are women and children.



Hanoi in the anti-US years
Oil, 1976, 142 × 106

ĐẶNG THỊ KHUÊ
(1946 -)

American pilot taken prisoner
Oil, 1980, 95 × 114

Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam in 1975. She worked at first for the Culture and Propaganda Service of Vinh Phu province before joining the Department of Information and Propaganda under the Ministry of Culture. As a painter, she belongs to the generation born after the August 1945 Revolution, whose talents appeared during the Resistance against American aggression. She mainly succeeds in oil painting; she has no leaning towards doing the effects, plays of light and shade as in Western art. With her bold strokes, she pays special attention to drawing. Her works show her special care for synthesis.

Armymen's family
Oil, 1974, 110 × 90

BỬU CHỈ
(1948 -)

New source of energy
Oil, 1978

Born in Hue, 1971: gained BA from the College of Law. 1969 — 72: took part in the intellectuals' movement against the puppet regime of Saigon, with his drawings and illustrations. 1971: arrested and imprisoned, liberated in 1975 following the victory of the people's army. Self-taught in oil painting, he has found an original style by borrowing from the numerous resources of modern techniques. A rational and vigorous mind, he unites sobriety of lines and masses with passion in tones and colours.

Birds and flowers
Oil, 1982, 120 × 90

NGUYỄN QUÂN

(1948 -)

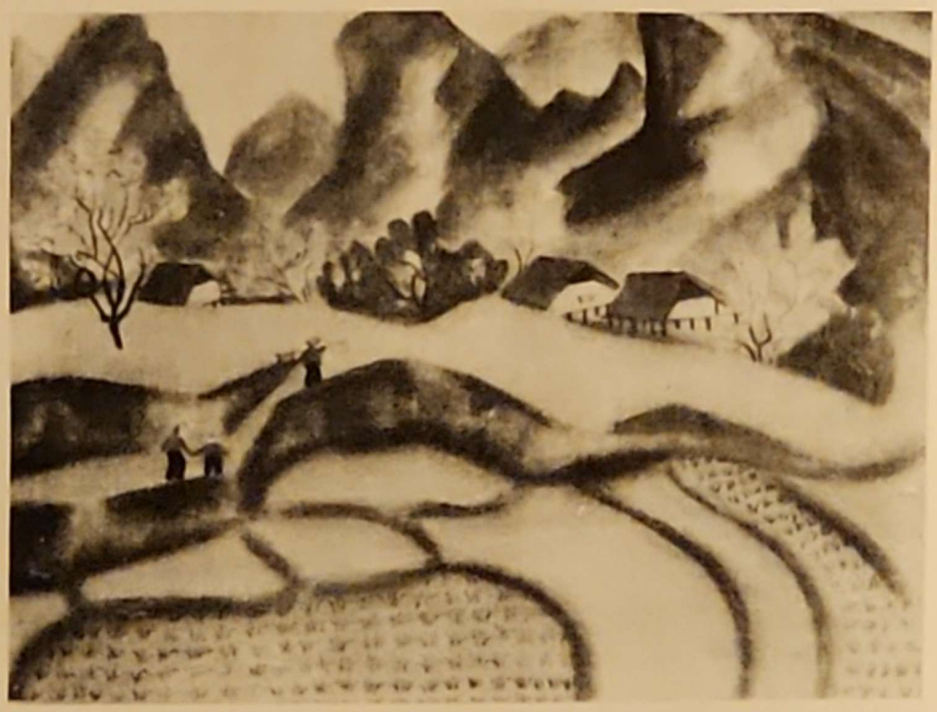
Preparations for a wedding party
Oil, 1983

Born in Ha Son Binh province. Since his school days, he was fond of drawing due to the teaching of the veteran painter Nam Son.

1965 — 71: studied mathematics in the G.D.R. During his stay abroad, he attended evening courses in painting and practised it by himself. After his return to Vietnam, he worked at the Institute of Economic Research and taught German. Known for his essays and critiques on art, he became Vice-Director of the Department of Theory and History of the College of Fine Arts of Hanoi. His oil paintings combine realism with abstraction rather similar to expressionism.

The flag on Dien Bien land
Oil, 1984, 105 × 125

CHU THỊ THÁNH
(1948 -)



Valley in spring
Silk, 1980, 48 × 38

Born in Lang Son (a province on the Vietnam-China borders), of the Nung ethnic minority. Graduated from the College of Fine Arts of Vietnam (1981), she teaches at the School of Culture and Arts on the Tay Nguyen Highlands (South Vietnam). Her silk paintings dealing with the landscapes and customs of her native town are remarkable for their fresh, artless vision and her range of colours recall those of a mountain region where green or indigo-blue coloured clothes are frequent.

Spring festival
Silk, 1980, 50 × 60

ANNEX

LACQUER AND LACQUER PAINTING IN VIETNAM

The lacquer tree (**Rhus succedanea**) growing on hills of a more or less laterized formation, chiefly in the region of Phu Tho, secretes a thick resin which, gathered in the early hours before sunrise, is the chief ingredient used in the manufacture of a special varnish which sticks fast to wood, bamboo, leather, copper and many kinds of metals. Following special treatment whose secret is known only to those with the special skills of this craft, the finished lacquer is either jet-black or acquires a particular transparency enabling it to take on various hues by the addition of some colouring substances.

The varnish so obtained is very durable and for centuries lacquer has been employed to coat various artifacts, some of which are found in tombs dating back about 1,800 years. It is still used chiefly to decorate articles in everyday use, ornamental boxes, furniture, vases, tablets for ritual purposes, altars, parallel sentences, also pillars and beams, facades of palaces and pagodas. Black

or transparent, with or without other colouring substances, lacquer shines with a particular brilliancy which imparts to the objects a magnificent lustre, captivating the eyes and conveying an impression of mysterious tranquility. The drawings made with gold and silver dust on a lacquer background stand out very distinctly and have great power of expression. The artist must exercise meticulous craftsmanship at each stage of the process, from the preparation of lacquer to its application in successive layers and the addition of colouring substances, the reproduction of the graphic model drawn on paper, the polishing with pumice-stone, and the drying in special conditions. These are operations requiring a great deal of precision.

In the old society, the art of lacquer-work had an essentially artisanal character with repeated motifs and stylized or symbolical figures. In the 1930's, with the cooperation of old craftsmen experienced in the trade, painters revived this profession, turning it into a new and original art form capable of expressing things not accessible to other forms of painting. New techniques of preparation and pumicing were devised and the artists, though they still had to conform to the exigencies of the precious material, were freed from the traditional canons of stylization and managed brilliantly to tailor their aesthetic inspiration to suit the forms and colours proper to lacquer. A truly liberated form of lacquer painting had made its appearance. The incorporation of egg-shell made it possible to create a pure or bluish white. The pumicing and colouring technique became more and more sophisticated.

The Vietnamese village with its clusters of bamboo trees fluttering in the wind or mirrored in the rippled water of a pond, the sunset, with all the splendour of crimson or golden clouds, the temples and pagodas with their mossy walls, the goldfish swimming in the aquarium, all these classic scenes are given a colouring and tonality so far unknown, as the new techniques in lacquer painting enable us to ally visual depth and a new range of evocative definition with purity of line and splendour of colour.

This very elaborate art requires a lot of time, imagination and sensitivity, the transition from a paper cartoon pattern to a lacquered panel involving multiple operations in the application of the layers of lacquer and repeated pumicings and dryings which little by little modify the colours and the depth of the various tonal planes so that the result is never quite what has been conceived at the outset.

After the August Revolution (1945), during the first war of resistance, material conditions for the execution of this meticulous art did not exist. Nevertheless, the artist patriots continued their research in the heart of the forests and discovered new cold tints which helped enrich their palettes. The liberation of the northern half of the country in 1954 led to a new development, characterized by the richness of the subject-matter of the paintings as well as by a variety of new styles. The splendour, depth and warmth of the lacquer, enhanced by gold and silver dust, mother-of-pearl, egg-shell as well as new pigments, have made it possible for artists to express new feelings, the pride of a liberated nation, the warm affection felt by the people for the combatants, the joy of working together, and with this an individual style characteristic of each painter has emerged. The range

of subjects of lacquer paintings now goes far beyond the traditional motifs of the artists under the colonial regime. The introduction of technical improvements, particularly the development of a variety of shades of grey, and the blossoming of a new generation of painters continuously inspire with fresh enthusiasm this ancient art which faces a bright future in a Vietnam reunified under the banner of socialism.

SILK PAINTING IN VIETNAM

In Asia, it was the Chinese people that were the first to paint pictures on silk. In the beginning, the Chinese artists drew pictures on silk so as to adorn folding-screens, dyptiches and fans.

In Japan the kakemonos are the paintings on silk of a masterline and of an originality with high quality.

Silk painting in Vietnam which completely counts on those traditions has known how to develop its national tendency and create its own tradition on this artistic domain.

During the First Resistance (1946 — 54) the fighting conditions and the shiftings did not fit for this fine work, and for silk painting; so it could develop weakly. And yet from 1954 with the re-establishment of peace, Vietnamese silk painting, after restoring its ancient traditions, has made much progress with every passing day.

If Vietnamese silk painting, belated as it was, is worthy of attention both at home and abroad, it is, first and foremost because it can express the national character to the highest degree.

Generally speaking, the lightness and tenderness of silk make the artist handle the colours and lines according to appropriate measures. The colours of the paintings on silk must be soft or be of a moderate and discret taste; the volumes must be simple and light; the lines must be free and full of softness. That means that in addition to general techniques, silk painting calls for a form of expression which while paying special attention to the thinness and the lightness of silk, takes care of reality.

The colours of Vietnamese silk paintings have not the rather unvarnished brilliance of the Western painting. They are soft, simple but never lack in grace. The lines of these silk paintings have neither the impulsiveness of the stroke of brush by Western artists nor the symbolical liberalism of Chinese water-colours in Indian ink. They are simple and free.

Also, nothing can render more effectively the national characteristics of Vietnam, the simple life of her people or her scenery full of tenderness, freshness and light.

In other words, the craftsmanship of silk paintings is, by virtue of its nature, a good ground for the artist in making use of and developing its own realism for the blossoming of national character.

Opinion was unanimous in assessing the silk paintings exhibited for the first time in Hanoi in 1954-55. For most of the visitors, they were "neither Chinese, Japanese nor French." It was an impartial appraisal of the value of its national character.

NGUYEN PHAN CHANH

A FOLK-ART

The inhabitants of Ho village in Bac Ninh province (north of Hanoi) have a traditional sideline occupation: drawing pictures and printing them on the occasion of Lunar New Year Festival.

Drawn, engraved on wood, then printed with rudimentary means on a kind of home-made paper coated with the white powder of oyster shell, these bright-coloured pictures made both old and young people happy. To understand the success of these people's artists, one had to witness the scene of peasants enthusiastically crowding around a picture vendor — usually a pretty woman — in rural markets held on the approach of Lunar New Year Festival.

Every family wanted to adorn its abode with some of these pictures. There was a choice between: "The Sow and the Piglets," "The Hen and Her Little Ones," "Scene of Jealousy,"! "Mister Preceptor Toad," "The Mice's Wedding," "Picking Coconuts" and many others. Bringing everyone good wish, expressing a dream or illustrating a moral precept, these pictures struck gay and fresh notes inside dark thatch houses.

Owing to harsh competition from foreign production and resulting from the policy of art assimilation of the imperialists, this art of Ho village gradually withered under the French domination. Instead of a large urban clientele, the sale of drawings of Ho village became limited to some small markets in the remote rural areas. When the War of Resistance broke out, the artists packed up their paints and brushes, took up rifles or joined groups of evacuees. Many of the wood engraving plates were burnt, used as firewood or thrown away by the colonialist troops in their mopping-up operations on Bac Ninh province (now part of Ha Bac province).

But since the liberation of North Vietnam, we have seen the resurrection of this art in Ho village as well as the training of new groups of artists in other places. Guided by old masters and assisted by the Government of the Vietnam Democratic Republic, these groups gradually resumed their work. During the Tet Festival of 1956, the markets were full of hand-printed pictures treating various subjects, old and new, at the service of the labouring people.

The pictures from Ho village serve as a base for the artists in the process of studying national pictorial art. Before the 1945 August Revolution, only a few artists — painter Nguyen Do Cung in particular — took an interest in popular sources. But ever since, especially during the war of resistance, guided by the Vietnamese Workers' Party along the national line, Vietnamese artists have made test drawings modelled on the picture of Ho village. Painters Tran Van Can and Ta Thuc Binh set about making posters publicizing the fight against illiteracy, enrolment in the army or the endeavour for production. In so doing, they were inspired by the methods of the peasants of Ho village whose drawings are all the more valuable as they are the only source of Vietnamese popular pictorial art known to date.

True, these pictures have not yet gone beyond the stage of popular drawings and suffer from an obvious lack of technique. They testify, however, to the existence of an art of profoundly national character emanating from the labouring masses, like folk-songs and dances and popular poems and theatre. While the mandarins and "learned" people patterned their taste on that of Chinese feudalists and were enthralled by pictures from China, the people created for themselves their own pictorial art.

Such pictures as "The Hen and Her Little Ones", "The Sow and the Piglets" with their lively strokes, show an image of prosperity. Others like "The Trung Sisters," "Thach Sanh", "Thuy Kieu" praise patriotism and fidelity to moral precepts. Besides, there is a whole category of satirical subjects denouncing the bad habits and manners of the feudalists and other ruling classes. Thus "Mister Preceptor Toad" wittily makes fun of the scholars who all day long keeps reciting sentences which they have learnt by heart. "The Mice's Wedding" mocks the ceremonious and complicated rites of the bourgeois and the feudalists. In this picture, the cat, which is seen calmly waiting for the fish offered her by the mice, embodies feudal corruption. "Scene of Jealousy" showing a husband and his concubine being threatened by his first wife is a humorous attack against polygamy. "Picking Coconuts" is a gay and bold drawing. Depicting a woman peasant revealing part of her thighs as she pulls up her skirt to gather coconuts, it is a successful illustration of popular songs and verse holding in derision the hypocritical "austerity" of feudal morality.

All these very simple pictures which reflect some aspects of the people's daily life and the special feature of the peasants outlook, breathe optimism. They also reflect a typical characteristic of the Vietnamese labouring people who under all circumstances can find an appropriate expression to ridicule the oppressors. It is really a courageous act to attack such "sacrosanct" social sections as the king, the mandarins and the "scholars" and to throw them down from the pedestals on which they have hoisted themselves.

From the technical point of view, the artists use simple primary colours: green, red, and yellow are predominant. In order to make the thatch cottages gayer, our artists have sacrificed the real tints and sought bright and lively ones.

It rests with the painters trained in modern schools to develop and popularize this art of the people, help the people's artists to improve their technique and find new subjects. In this way, the pictures created by the peasants of Ho village may continue to effectively serve the people.

SY NGOC

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